Lilith

ependent, Jewish & frankly feminist

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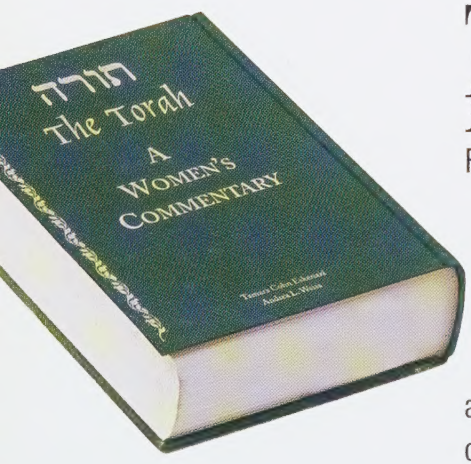
Bertha Alyce, by her daughter, Gay Block



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Lilith

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In the Garden of Eden, long before the eating of the apple, the Holy One created the first human beings—a man, Adam, and a woman, Lilith. Lilith said, "We are equal because we are created from the same earth."
Alphabet of Ben Sira, 23a-b

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Cover by Gay Block, "Mother as Icon," 1978. "I began photographing Mother in 1973, when my first photography teacher instructed the class to shoot something we wanted to understand. I photographed Mother until she died in 1991. It took me 10 more years to understand her well enough to finish the video, book and exhibition comprised of her pictures and words." *Bertha Alyce: Mother exPosed* comes with DVD. *www.gayblock.com*

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Lilith

Editor in Chief
Susan Weidman Schneider *susanws@lilith.org*

Managing Editor
Naomi Danis *naomi@lilith.org*

Senior Editor
Susan Schnur *susanschnur@lilith.org*

Assistant Editor
Melanie Weiss *melanie@lilith.org*

Fiction Editor
Yona Zeldis McDonough

Poetry Editor
Marge Piercy

Book Reviews
Ilana Kurshan *ilana@lilith.org*

Advertising
Ellen Jacobs *ellen@lilith.org*

Art Directors
Lindsay Barnett *lindsay@lilith.org*
Bryn Smith

Photographer
Joan Roth

Intern
Shira Bistricer

Board of Directors
Frances Brandt, Eve Coulson, Barbara B. Dobkin, Deborah Fuller, Joyce Elsa Goodman, Heidi Gralla, Yvette Gralla, Michal Hart Hillman, Natalie Pelavin, Susan Weidman Schneider, Rose Zoltek-Jick

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Lilith
250 West 57th Street, #2432
New York, NY 10107
phone: 212-757-0818 fax: 212-757-5705
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In a season of landmarks both thrilling (the presidential election) and harrowing (everything else), a bright spot is the great Lilith archival content coming soon to a computer near you. You can help speed its arrival.

Why mothers *now*?

Have you ever looked at the grumpy funnybook *How to Be a Jewish Mother* by Dan Greenburg? The one that sprang forth in bookstores and synagogue gift shops circa 1975? Jewish sons got their mothers out of their systems decades ago, but just in case, a 30th anniversary edition reissued Greenburg's advice on guilt, food, sex and the endless elasticity of the umbilical cord. For daughters it's different.

For daughters, there's no parallel stereotype to the mother forcing galoshes on resistant boys, or lavishing too much attention on them. For daughters, there seems to be a more complicated legacy of individuation, separation, adoration.

The feature section in this issue—daughters on their mothers—resonates for me; I'm still trying hard to sort out, eight years after my own mother's death, what her influence on me was and is, where she ends and I begin. (And you can bet that none of us who are the mothers of daughters will escape unscathed from the lasered scrutiny of our own offspring, either.) How do a mother's choices, or lack thereof, determine a daughter's path? A generation ago, in a kind of ancestor-worship, Jewish women focused on the revered Bubbe. Now, maybe stronger in a sense of ourselves, we're looking, closer to home, at Mother—not with eye-rolling skepticism but with precise frankness. And, as you'll read here, the inspection can bring as much confusion as pleasure.

How did we become aware of this shift in focus from Bubbe to Mom? In part, by flipping back through Lilith's pages, an amazing treasure-trove of published articles. This comprises a precious archive we are now digitizing so that you, too, will have easy access to all of Lilith's historic content.

YES—FREE ARCHIVES! SOON!

Coming soon to a computer near you, we hope, will be digital access to all previous content in Lilith since the launch of this unique magazine in 1976! This is our gift to you, Lilith readers, and to the girls and women in generations of feminists to come.

All our covers and Table of Contents pages are already available at *Lilith.org*, and soon they'll be joined by full-text articles and art from back issues, some of them gathered in anthology format.

See the movie "Milk" and want to know more? Soon you'll be able to access all of Lilith's writings on gender-rights laws and on Jewish gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender issues. Thinking about in-vitro fertilization? Soon you can read online all that Lilith published in the past by women who have experienced such new reproductive technologies. Someone call you or your student a JAP? Find out in Lilith's back issues why this prejudice persists, why the slur hasn't gone the way of some other forbidden ethnic epithets. Obama's mixed-race heritage in the news again? Check out Lilith's first-person narratives by Black-Jewish young adults.

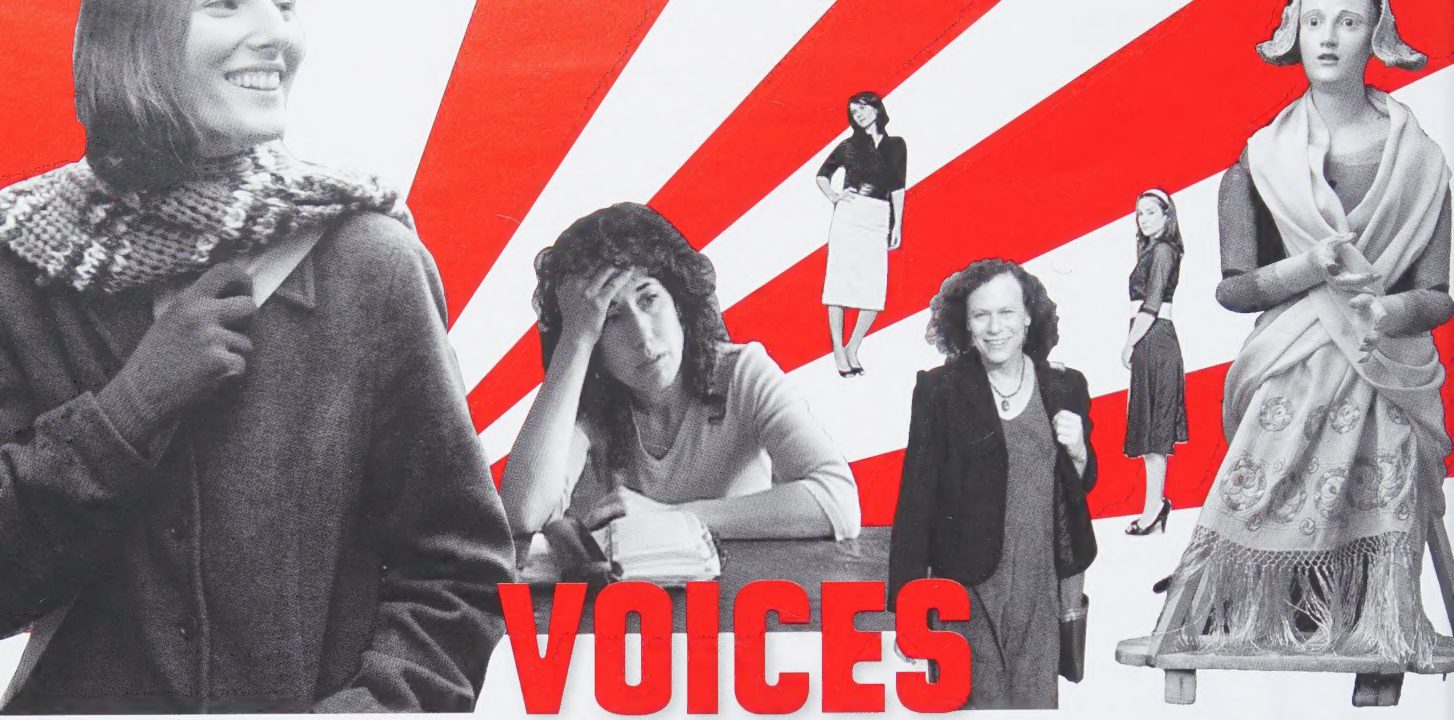
Right now—today—you can buy actual back issues with these stories, and more, on our website. Look at the inside back cover of this issue for some samples of the content which gives rich context for our lives today.

Here's what else you can do right now. We need your help to bring to digital life all this extraordinary content—more than 30 years of smart reading from Lilith. Searchable! Because we want to make these investigative reports, memoirs, fiction, poetry, essays and all the rest available free of charge to every student, academic, and curious feminist, please make a tax-deductible contribution to Lilith today. You can do this securely at *Lilith.org*. and I'll send you an email as soon as the archives are ready for your reading pleasure. And you can even tell us what kinds of articles you'd like to see gathered together. As always, we promise to listen.

Thank you for joining Lilith in this task.

Susan

Susan Weidman Schneider
Editor in Chief



VOICES

Traditionally the voice of a Jewish woman was not to be heard in public lest it arouse men. These pages are for news about Jewish women in our own strong voices.

Another "First and Only"— Italy's Rabbi Barbara Aiello

Asked for places on earth where exciting Jewish things are happening, few people might mention Italy, but Rabbi **Barbara Aiello**—Italy's first and only female rabbi—is stirring things up there. Aiello, born and raised in the United States, works with both the established Jewish communities she's found as well as with communities of *anousim*, people with Jewish ancestry who were driven underground by the Inquisition. Although many do not identify as Jewish, a great number of these families still carry on family customs that originated in their hidden Jewish practices.

"Many modern Italian historians now believe that prior to the Expulsion and Inquisition [in Italy], nearly 50 percent of the total population of Sicily and Calabria, the deep south of the Italian 'Boot' was Jewish!" Aiello told Lilith. "Where earlier historians made their mistake was to assume that because synagogues no longer existed, Jews no longer existed. What these historians did not understand is that there is a vast difference between burning synagogues and closing Jewish schools—in other words, eliminating institutional Judaism—and what we Spanish and Italian Jews actually did, which was to take our traditions into the closets, cellars and secret rooms of our own homes."

In addition to Jewish names that have survived—surnames like Bandiera, Bagnato, and Aprile, as well as many names that begin with "Di," which functioned like the Hebrew "ben"—many practices have indeed survived these past 500 years, even though the roots of many are unknown. Rabbi Aiello explains: "We can't have Rosh Hashanah for our new year? OK, we'll blow a horn on Dec. 31st (a Sicilian custom traced to the Jews). We can't call it Pesach? We have to say '*Pasqua*?' OK, we'll eat '*pane azimo*' (unleavened bread) and when you ask us why we'll say. '*Per la Pasqua dei ebrei*'—for the Easter of the Jews! We'll put red strings over our baby's cribs but we won't say that's a Jewish tradition from the Kaballah. No, that's just too dangerous. Instead we use the red string to keep away the 'evil eye'. And we will never eat dairy and meat in the same meal because '*fa male*', it's not good for the digestion."

High Holy Days in Turin, Sici

Rabbi Aiello currently serves as official rabbi for Turin's Congregation Or Chadash, but she works all over the country, including Calabria, Nicastro and much of Sicily. Responsible for 54 official conversions during her four years in Italy, Rabbi Aiello reported to the organization Kulanu ("dedicated to finding and assisting lost and dispersed remnants of the Jewish people") that she is particularly proud of the "Status Recognition" she has garnered for those who use her as their rabbi when they convert. This is special recognition, in addition to their formal conversion to Judaism, that these *anousim's* ancestors had their Jewish roots forcibly destroyed.

You can follow Rabbi Aiello's new projects on her website, RabbiBarbara.com.

MELANIE WEISS

On Nov. 5, **Tzvia Greenfield** became the first ultra-Orthodox woman in the Israeli Knesset.

"I see myself as a pioneer to be followed by many other people, especially women who want to break through the rules of separation in Israeli society."

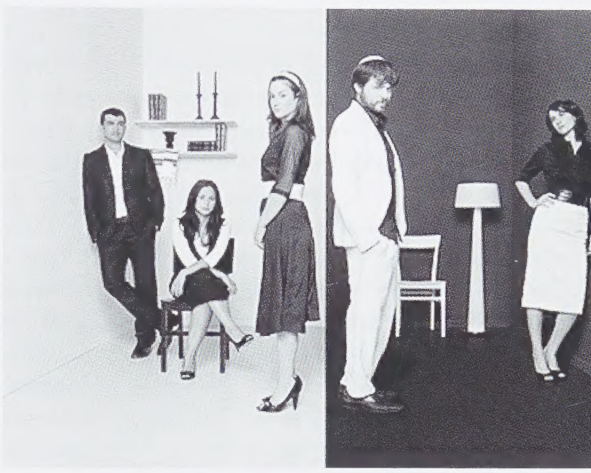
from Ynet.com, reported in "Cheers and Jeers of the Week," Women's Enews, November 8, 2008

Martha Minow, a Harvard Law School Professor (and former professor of President-elect Barack Obama), speaks her love for both Jewish and American law; both, she notes, "stress the significance of *stories*."

At a recent symposium in New York sponsored by the Covenant Foundation.

Religious Feminism Finally Makes it in Israel

Beginning in June, 2008, an Israeli cable station has broadcast a weekly comedy/drama/soap opera called "Srugim." (The word refers to knitted *kippot*.) The show is about the so-called Jerusalem *bitza*—"swamp"—in the Katamon-Bak'a—German Colony area, home to many young Modern Orthodox singles. The series revolves around the lives of three thirty-ish women and the men they date (or simply hang around with). They watch "Monty Python" and "Seinfeld" but keep strictly kosher, observe Shabbat, and struggle with religious restrictions on intimacy. Themes of sexual tensions, interaction with secular society, problems of commitment, etc., are not new to Israelis. In the last several years, there have been four prime-time series on Israeli television that have portrayed Modern Orthodox—and even ultra-Orthodox—Jews, as full-fledged human beings.



But in "Srugim" for the first time, one of the leading characters is self-defined as a religious feminist. Re'ut, an affluent and successful accountant, seems desperate to find a husband, without compromising her career. Expressing her religious feminism, in the opening episode of the series at a Shabbat dinner with men and women, she makes *Kiddush*, the blessing over the wine traditionally made by a man in many settings. And to honor her father's *yahrzeit*, she beautifully chants the haftara at a women's service. These scenes seem to indicate that feminism, if it can feature so prominently on a TV soap, is now part of mainstream religious life in Israel.

Although most of the actors on the show are totally secular, the creators/writers—a man and a woman, **Chava Divon** and **Eliezer Schapiro**—are both graduates of Ma'aleh, a religious film school in Jerusalem. The school has produced some fine professionals, who tend to stress Jewish themes and eschew nudity or explicit sex in the films they make. Religious filmmakers, poetry journals and theater groups, as well as a feminist movement, Kolech, that recently celebrated the first decade of its existence, are all part of a quiet revolution within the Israeli Modern Orthodox community since the 1990s. The series "Srugim" has received rave reviews from both religious and secular viewers but has been—predictably—condemned by some prominent Religious Zionist rabbis, mostly for the sexual themes and mild physical contact between men and women that are portrayed (although it's questionable whether some of these rabbis permit watching television at all).

Secular viewers, on the other hand, have praised the scripts and the acting. A secular Tel Aviv viewer remarked that "It seems very realistic. The dilemma of 'whom will I marry?' is present in the secular community, as well, but with less angst."

DEBBIE WEISSMAN

A Transgender Teacher at Yeshiva

Yes, it's true: Professor **Joy Ladin**, who teaches literature at Yeshiva University and runs the Writing Center at Stern College for Women, is transgender. She used to be Professor Jay Ladin, and that shift, when she returned to work this fall after a two-year hiatus, has provoked attention from the Jewish media and beyond.

Professor Ladin came out as trangender—and transitioning from male to female—in 2006, after receiving tenure. She has been on indefinite leave since then. While there has been intense debate and plenty of ventilation-by-media, the faculty and students seem, generally, to take this development in stride. Rabbi Moshe Tendler, though, a dean of the rabbinical school at YU, referred to Ladin as "being in massive violation of Torah law, Torah ethics and Torah morality."

Although Yeshiva University has a religious component to its curriculum, it does not have a religious requirement for its staff, which includes non-Jews and non-Orthodox Jews as well as those who are Orthodox; its mission statement mentions providing "Torah teachings" for its students, but presents no requirements or standards for their observance, nor for that of the faculty and staff. The politics and legality of Ladin's continued presence at Yeshiva University are still being worked out, although the ACLU has won prior cases for transgender rights in the workplace—including one just days after the Ladin story broke—on the basis of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act, which prohibits sex discrimination in the workplace.

Student response has ranged from passionate support to equally inflamed opprobrium for Professor Ladin, although students also report a great deal of apathy and disinterest on campus. Rena, a YU student who chose to use only her first name, said "people have been very opinionated." She added, "If a professor is a good professor, what does it matter what he or she does in his or her own time? Once we start monitoring professors, do we need to start checking that they keep perfectly kosher? That they follow all religious rules a particular way?" Asked about media coverage of Professor Ladin's case at Yeshiva University, Rena immediately responded, "Very unfair. The New York Post chose to speak to a professor who they knew was very conservative, and it painted a picture of YU that I don't think is at all accurate."

M.W.

On women serving as rabbis in all but the title:

"Despite my reservations about being called Rabbi, the lack of title has very real consequences for me as a woman working at a synagogue. It has been a struggle for me to receive the tax allowance that is granted to clergy because, although I am a graduate of the Drisha Scholars Circle, the IRS does not recognize a degree that is not formal ordination. And if, in a few years, I were to pursue a promotion from my current position, no such possibility exists.

I serve as an assistant to something I can never be."

Rachel Kohl Finegold, from "What's in a Title? The Role of Female Religious Professionals," in the spring 2008 issue of JOFA Journal

"What strikes me is that the frum women dominate the space in the gym—and I don't necessarily mean physically. Golders Green is actually a very multicultural area, and there are an assortment of women at the gym, however, none seem to claim ownership of the public space in the same way that the frum women do. Having colonised the running machines, they pant loudly and then speak even more loudly about their personal issues and the community with little regard for other women who may be there. These women may have very large physical spaces in their own homes, but may have very little emotional or mental space in which to manoeuvre. Ironically, the womens' gym room is quite a claustrophobic physical space, but somehow acts to liberate these women emotionally."

From "The Gym" by **Modesty Blasé**, The Lilith Blog, October 27, 2008

THE LARGEST CIRCULATION MONTHLY JEWISH DIGEST IN AMERICA
World Jewish Digest
Confronting Issues Facing Israel and World Jewry
NOVEMBER 2007
The Changing Face of Jewish Philanthropy
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Everybody Loves Alber. The Israeli designer reigns on the Parisian runway.
PAGE 49
LISA KEYS
Leading by Example. Ruth Messinger shines a spotlight on Jewish social action.
PAGE 29
GEORGE D. HANUS
The Great American Jewish Placebo. It is time we swallowed a bitter pill: Hebrew schools don't work.
PAGE 13
JEWISH FAMILY LIFE
8-page pull-out section!

For the first time, a woman will head the central organization for Conservative rabbis. The Rabbinical Assembly has announced that **Rabbi Julie Schonfeld** has been appointed its new executive vice president. She told Lilith that she looks forward to partnering "on projects for women rabbis' advancement."

Lilith congratulates Rabbi Schonfeld and poses these questions: Will having a woman in this position make a difference in how Judaism is practiced in the Conservative movement? How will her presence make a difference to women looking for pulpit positions?

"Women have served in the Israeli Defense Forces since the country's inception six decades ago and a small number fought in the War of Independence in 1948. But it wasn't until 1995 that a Supreme Court case opened air force pilots' courses to women after a ban imposed in the 1950s.

Today, there are 19 female air crew officers in the Israeli Air Force, including 11 pilots. In 2000 the army service law was amended to state that women are equal to men in their right to serve excluding positions "whose demands and essence preclude women" from doing so. …

Naomi Chazan, a former parliamentarian who was instrumental in amending the 2000 service law, says women are still not being integrated into all combat roles they want due to "inbuilt chauvinism" in the army and pressure from national religious groups.

Israel "is the only place where women have compulsory service in the world today, and if it has to happen it should be done equally," Chazan said in a phone interview. "Hopefully, it will humanize the army but not as much as peace will."

Brenda Gazzar, from "Israel's Female Soldiers Face Military Inspection," Women's Enews, Sept 12, 2008

Art from the Womb

When **Gitl Braun**'s art professor suggested, "Go back to your womb," Braun took the advice literally. The Hasidic mother of eight retreated to her family's sukkah, which doubles as her studio, and studied a photograph of her uterus, taken after her recent hysterectomy. When she noticed its striking resemblance to the pomegranates strung above her head, something "just clicked," recalls the Israel-born, London-based artist. "I covered a pomegranate in a cotton serviette, like it was skin, and started to photograph it." Then she eliminated the fruit and photographed just pieces of gauzy white cloth whose "folds and creases were like a metaphor for the body," she explains.

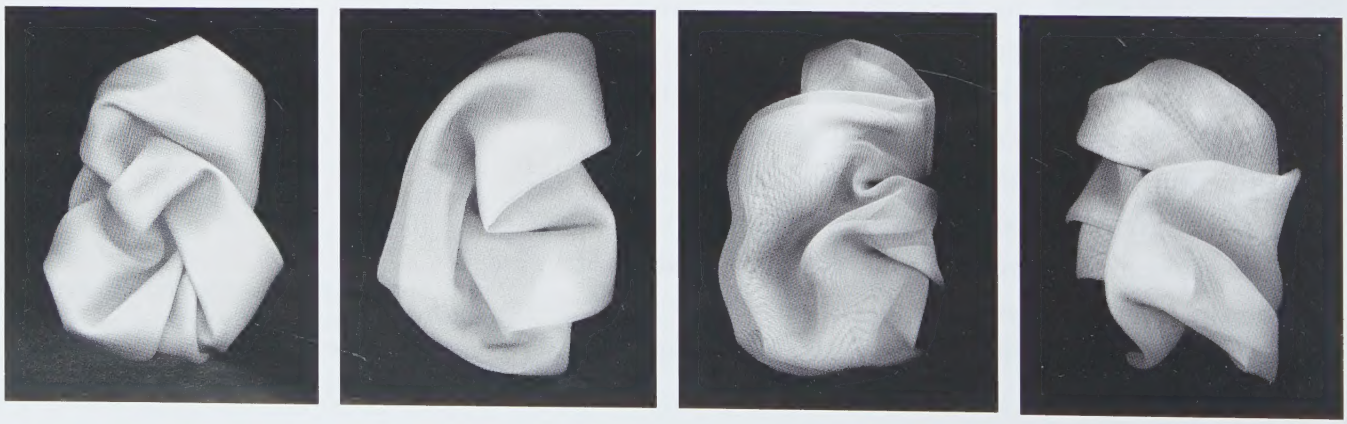
This experiment was an important step in a long inward journey, begun only in Braun's early 50s, when she gained entrance to a five-year program at London's prestigious Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design. For the first time in her life, the artist—who had entered into an arranged marriage with **Marton Braun** at age 18—was asked to explore her womanhood, motherhood and religion. The photographs she created along the way document her self-discovery, and their haunting beauty has struck a chord in the London art world. In the past two years, Braun, modest in both dress and demeanor, has been named one of the top 10 on Saatchi Online, a Web site where thousands of nonprofessional artists display their work. She has shown at several venues in London and at the Soho Synagogue in Manhattan, and is having a solo show in March at London's The Gallery in Cork Street.

For Braun's first-ever public exhibition, her graduation show at Saint Martins, she showed her series of fabric images but, sadly, was not there to see them: She was in Israel, sitting shiva for her mother. This intersection of new beginning and ending is a theme running through not only her biography but also her work. Braun—who describes her process in such terms as "giving breath," "animating" and "bringing to life"—photographs sculptures of her own making. Much of her source material is found by her husband, a lifelong collector of Jewish art and artifacts, such as the Hebrew printing blocks in Braun's self-described modern masterpiece, *Martyred Letters*, 2007. She carefully arranged the blocks to look like a pile of rubble and spelled out the words, "Hanehovim Haneimim Vehayesharim," meaning "The Beloved, The Pleasant, and The Just," from the Av Harachaman prayer recited on the Sabbath for the souls of the martyrs.

For her most recent series, "Awakening Puppets," 2007–08, she revivified early-19th-century Sicilian wooden dolls by draping them in antique fabrics and assigning them characters, mostly from the Bible. Next, Braun hopes to travel to Catalonia, Spain, to photograph 13th-to-14th-century registrars' books whose bindings, it was recently discovered, were made from recycled Jewish manuscripts. "Gitl has realized their visual potential, in their raw form," Marton explains, visibly excited, "as they emerge after burial of 700 or 800 years."

In other words, Braun, at age 58, will give them something she has also managed to give herself: a second life.

JULIE BRENER



In an interview with Newsweek magazine, **Dalia Itzik**, speaker of the Knesset, talks about her dual life as a politician and a mother. "If you want to be a good father or a good mother, you don't want nurses bringing up your children. I don't know any mother in the world who doesn't feel guilty. You suffer so much from guilt. Sometimes you're exhausted just from the guilt. Now my children are grown up and big enough to judge for themselves. What you fear is they'll say, 'Mommy, you weren't there.' Sometimes I come to them and say I want to stop. But they say, 'No, stay.'"

from "Newsweek Picks Dalia Itzik as Role Model," by Itamar Eichner, published on Ynet.com, October 10, 2008

No Fear of Flying

Since it's touted by reviewers and publicity people alike as a "real-life" or "high-brow soap opera," you might think **Jennifer Fox**'s newest documentary, "Flying: Confessions of a Free Woman," isn't about serious stuff. But, boy—or woman!—would you be wrong.

The film has aired at big-name festivals from Sundance to Edinburgh to Vancouver to acclaim. Fox, a director who has been involved with documentary film-making for more than 20 years, created this six-hour documentary to showcase both the complexities of being a modern woman as she saw them in her own life and the experiences of women around the globe—from New York to Cambodia to South Africa to Russia. Facing the many conflicting messages women now get about "choice," the women of this film are struggling to find how they can belong, and what they, as women, are entitled to want and have. The six one-hour segments follow Jennifer's own struggles with relationships and her biological clock, explore the situations of her friends, then zoom out to explore global women's issues—in particular the sex trade.

Fox excels at what she calls "pass the camera" technique, which draws on her vision of female conversations: open-ended and circular, more process- than product-oriented and not always linear. In short, more kitchen-table talk than traditional interviews. "Pass the camera" may be physically simple (it's just what it sounds like), but the result is astounding. Viewers will be pulled in not only by Fox's vulnerability, but by the frankness and openness with which her subjects respond to being partners in a larger conversation—honest and personal discussions about masturbation, abortion, rape, cultural assumptions about sex, and how women feel about childbearing, to name just a few. A philosophy as much as a camera technique, the concept of "pass the camera" has kept "Flying" from going stale or static; viewers now post videos to the film's website (flyingconfessions.com) and continue the conversation.

M.W.

"Striking new evidence has emerged of a widespread gap in the cost of health insurance, as women pay much more than men of the same age for individual insurance policies providing identical coverage, according to new data from insurance companies and online brokers.... **Marcia D. Greenberger**, co-president of the National Women's Law Center, an advocacy group that has examined hundreds of individual policies, said: 'The wide variation in premiums could not possibly be justified by actuarial principles. We should not tolerate women having to pay more for health insurance, just as we do not tolerate the practice of using race as a factor in setting rates'."

from "Women Buying Health Policies Pay a Penalty" by Robert Pear, published in the *New York Times*, October 29, 2008

Your dr

WIN $10,C

maiden

dream

That dream you've been waiting to see in a M
it may win you $10,000 in cash!—or any one of 239 othe
So send in your dream ideas immediately—you m

NOTHING TO BUY! EVERYONE CAN TRY! SEND IN A

Put on your thinking cap. Dream up a dream lik
in my Maidenform bra". Remember? Or—"I dreamed I w
—"I dreamed I was a social butterfly". What's y

Win $10,000! Pick the dream in which Chansonette, America's favorite bra (as shown), will be featured. It rounds as it accentuates... makes the most of every

FIRST PRIZE $10,000 cash! SECOND PRIZE
4 prizes of $250 each; 10 prizes of $100 each;
25 prizes of $50 each and 200 prizes of $20 ea
Over $20,000 in cash prizes!

Sima's Undergarments for Women

fiction by ILANA STANGER-ROSS

SIMA WOULD SAY, AFTERWARDS, THAT SHE DIDN'T COME TO THE BRA BUSINESS—IT CAME TO HER.

"You need to keep yourself busy," Connie told her. They'd run into each other outside the green grocer, where Sima had responded to her suggestion that they get a manicure together with an indifferent shrug. "I've been thinking about it," Connie continued. "You need to get a job. Something to get up for every morning, something that'll be fun."

"A barrel of laughs, I'm sure," Sima said, dropping three tomatoes into a plastic sleeve.

Connie ignored the comment. "A legal secretary maybe, or a saleslady at A&S or Gimbels—just think of the discounts."

Sima tied a knot at the top of the baggie, frowned. She didn't know many working women her age: most of her friends had married straight out of high school, and though a few earned degrees as teachers and nurses or entered the family business—textiles, electronics—they stopped working when the babies were born, staying at home at least until all the kids had entered school.

"Come on, Sima," Connie said, following her over to the oranges. "You know if you'd been raised anywhere but the Boro Park ghetto we came from, you'd have gone to college, gotten a real job. You're so smart and so capable—you saved us from poverty, for God's sake."

Sima pretended to concentrate on the oranges—the pale ones, she'd recently read, were the sweetest—not wanting to admit how the compliment flattered. "I did not save you from poverty, Connie, I just taught you how to keep a budget."

"Poverty, Sima. My boys would be in rags if it weren't for you."

Sima looked up. "Are you being fresh with me?" she teased, repeating a question she'd heard Connie put to Nate and Howie.

Connie laughed. "Think about it, okay? Just do me that favor."

Sima became the bookkeeper for three neighborhood shops: Faye's Fashions, Michael's Film and Processing, and Holy Land Travel. She'd been concerned about Faye's Fashions before she began. Changing outfits three times before the interview, she was sure she wouldn't be as elegant as they'd like, but it quickly became her favorite place to work. At the film and travel shops she sat away from the customers: at Michael's she shared an old metal desk with a barely mustached teenager whose job it was to sort the photographs into the correct envelopes, and whose beet-red blushes gave away every bikini-clad woman—worse, Sima didn't let herself think—he came across, and though Holy Land gave her a mahogany desk complete with olive desk-set, the leather cylinder always flush with pens, they expected only that she would sit quietly for the time it took to balance their accounts, then leave.

But at Faye's she sat beside the counter with one of the shop girls, or with Faye herself—her hair dyed blond, her nails long, her voice husky from three decades of smoking, her smile always conspiratorial, always making Sima feel it was her and Faye against the world. Faye paid her for only five hours a week, ten at tax time, but Sima often stayed longer, standing beside Faye as they looked through the samples the salesmen brought or debated what to put on sale, and for how much.

"You," Faye once said, "are the typical Boro Park woman. I'm here to give that woman flair, but I can only push so far—you're like my litmus test."

"If I'd wear it," Sima laughed, "then anyone would, right?"

Faye smiled. "Only thirty-five, and already the most conservative woman in Boro Park."

"Except for the Hasidim."

"Except for the Hasidic men, maybe. You wear short sleeves and pants, sure, but have you seen how nice some of those women dress? I'm thinking of designing a line just for them. Every spring we'd do a High Holy Days fashion debut. Can you imagine what I could make on hats alone?"

Faye became a friend. Sima loved sitting beside her, coffee and cookies always within reach, as she gossiped with each woman who entered the shop. "We sell them something better than themselves," Faye would tell her. And though the clothing was mostly cotton and polyester, Sima felt, as she watched a woman grin at her reflection, turn before the mirror, that Faye really was a fairy godmother, capable of making even the dullest women gleam.

Sima confided in Faye, as all the women did. She told her that she was barren, to which Faye replied that barren was a terrible word, horrible, and she never wanted Sima to say it again. "Barren is a desert where nothing grows. That's not you, Sima. That's the opposite of you."

Sima believed her when they were together, in the shop with the women laughing under cream-colored lights ("No one wants to be naked under fluorescents," Faye told her), or smoking cigarettes in the backroom while Faye updated her on the gossip ("You didn't know Hazel has mafia connections?"). But at home she felt barren, just as Faye understood the word: empty, useless. She and Lev had lost each other, and though sometimes the space she felt between them made her angry and sometimes ashamed, more and more she became resigned to what she imagined was not uncommon: two people living together who did not exactly love each other, but who had no reason to leave each other either.

All the women at Faye's Fashions complained about their husbands, and though Sima suspected that the distraction of children made their marriages happier than hers, she also knew her own parents had not loved as she'd once hoped she and Lev would. How many did, she asked herself, and how much, after all, could one expect from life? The country was at war; the evening news full of images of dead soldiers, burned jungles. Her own sorrows were insignificant beside that reality, the barren desert Faye conjured no larger than a brushing of sand in the weeds that grew against the public bathrooms at Brighton Beach.

Sima had been at the store two years when Faye announced her retirement. It was not just surprising; it was a betrayal. "You're barely fifty," Sima argued, concentrating to keep her voice calm, "who retires so young?"

"I want to be a lady of leisure while I still have time to enjoy it."

"Time? You'll have fifty years."

Faye placed her hands on either side of Sima's face. "My own dear child," she said, smiling, "I'm off on a new adventure. Can't you be happy for me?"

Sima thought a moment. The answer punched her in the stomach: "No."

FAYE HAD A COUSIN WHO SOLD SHOES FROM HER BASEMENT AND WAS LOOKING TO EXPAND; SHE CAME BY THE STORE BEFORE IT CLOSED, BOUGHT WHAT WAS LEFT OF FAYE'S HANDBAG AND BELT STOCK. "Talk about ideal," Sima told Faye after the cousin left, "a business in your own basement. You don't even have to walk two blocks to work."

"You know how she got it?" Faye asked.

Sima shook her head no, though Faye had told her before.

"Well," Faye said, sitting down. "So—"

Sima listened again to the cousin's story: her father had owned a shoe store on 13th Avenue and kept his overstock in their basement a few blocks away. Eventually his regulars realized the basement contained the best bargains and began to go straight there.

"Why pay rent when you've got a basement?" Faye asked. "For a small operation like they have, it's perfect."

"I have a finished basement," Sima said, as if she'd never realized it before. "Actually, since we're just one block off Thirteenth, it's a great location for a store, right near everything."

Faye looked at Sima. "Are you thinking of going into business yourself?"

"No, no," Sima said, shaking her head. "I just meant I have a good basement for that sort of thing is all."

"Well, but have you thought of it? I haven't sold off all my stock yet. The lingerie—"

Sima had thought of it—her own shop, women asking her advice—but didn't want to admit the fantasy for fear of Faye's reaction. "What would I do," Sima said, "just up and open a shop?"

"That's what I did."

"I thought your father owned it first."

Faye waved her hand. "He sold junk. I changed everything when I took over."

"Still," Sima told her, "it probably wouldn't work."

Faye didn't respond, and Sima took her silence as agreement. She wanted to protest—though she wasn't much for fashion, it was surprisingly easy to order the basics and follow well-established trends, and as for customers, the truth was she knew some of them preferred her matter-of-fact approach to Faye's exhausting need to entertain. But instead of arguing, she rejected the possibility herself, before Faye could. "It was just a thought," Sima said, "nothing serious—"

"I've got it!" Faye spread her hands apart as if unveiling a marquee. "Sima's Showcase. Sima's Showcase—is that not perfect?"

Sima grinned.

FOUR MONTHS AFTER FAYE SOLD HER BUSINESS, SIMA OPENED SIMA'S UNDERGARMENTS FOR WOMEN, FINANCED BY THE MONEY IN THE PURPLE TALLIS BAG PLUS A DECADE'S BANKING INTEREST.

It was not, Sima considered as she waited in line at the bank, how her mother would have wanted the money spent. The savings was not a gift to enjoy or money to take a risk with but a lesson in thrift: all this I saved on the few dollars a week your father gave me. It spoke of denial rather than wealth, and as Sima tucked the cashier's check into her wallet—almost all of which would go to buying Faye's stock from her, along with the cash register, counter, some chairs and the dressing-room bench—she

flushed with pleasure to think how the money would buy her independence, a life fully different from her mother's.

In the first few months Sima felt like an impostor, just some woman feigning authority and expertise. She worried she'd made a terrible mistake; the customers wouldn't come, she'd be left alone, buried, she half-joked to Connie, by all the boxes in her basement.

But the customers did come. Every time the doorbell rang, she felt flush with the miracle—they were here for her, and just some flyers she'd paid a neighborhood boy to distribute and word of mouth from Faye to account for it. And although she'd worried, too, that once in the shop she'd disappoint them, she soon found that the authority of shopkeeper gave her a new confidence to make small talk—a joke here, a compliment there—she'd never had before. As Faye's stock ran out and she began to replace it, getting to know the salesmen and developing her own opinions of brands—what was worth the price and what wasn't—she began to feel that her authority was earned. One afternoon Sima returned to Bloomingdale's, this time as a spy, and was shocked to see the shoddiness of the lingerie they sold, the ignorance of the saleswomen, the complete lack of concern for fitting a customer properly.

Faye replied that barren was a terrible word, horrible, and she never wanted Sima to say it again.

"I could have walked out of there with a bra completely the wrong size, and no one would have cared," she told Connie. "Is that not appalling?" Though Connie was not as shocked as she might have been—"You went to Bloomies? Why didn't you call me?"—Sima knew she no longer needed Connie's confirmation to make a thing true. Compared to department store clerks, she was an expert, and so an expert she became. She became more confident fitting women, pulling aside the curtain to check size and shape, forgetting, in the moments she evaluated the bra, that it was another woman's body, as imperfect and insecure as her own, that she observed. Because she forgot, they forgot, and when the women smiled at their reflections Sima was proud to think that like Faye before her, she gave each woman just a little more comfort, a little more happiness, than she'd had before.

One day a customer surprised Sima by touching her on the arm, telling her it'd been a year since the shop opened, hadn't it, and where had she ever gone before?

It was August, the air outside thick with the sort of still summer heat that made it impossible to believe the ocean bordered the borough, dark blue waves and pebbled sand and the rounded edges of glass shards worn by the sea. Sima thanked the customer, flush with pride—a feeling she had not known since the earliest days with Lev. After the customer left, Sima reached under the cash register for a photograph Faye had sent when she first moved to Florida: Faye on the beach in white slacks and a blue-striped sweater, her hands thrown open as if to say—here it is. "Thank you, Faye," Sima whispered to the picture, "I owe you."

The shop grew. From bras and underwear Sima expanded to slips, nightgowns, bridal wear, swimsuits. Sima's Undergarments for Women became a neighborhood fixture, word of mouth spreading sales through and then beyond Boro Park. Women came from Bensonhurst, Brighton Beach, Coney Island, Crown Heights, and Flatbush; retirees visited from Miami and Boca Raton; children returned from Houston, Chicago, and Los Angeles to shop at Sima's, stock up until the next trip home.

It was from one of the visiting retirees that Sima learned of Faye's death. She hadn't even known Faye was sick—they'd lost touch years before—and even as she sighed and clucked through the details—breast cancer, a double mastectomy and chemotherapy, a two-year fight, a hospice at the end with a sliver of ocean visible from her bed—Sima folded the news away, waiting for a free moment to think it through.

She didn't remember until she washed her face for bed that evening—the cold pull of water unfurling the knowledge of Faye's death from a gray fold somewhere. Sima saw Faye as she looked in that picture, long since thrown away after being stained with diet soda: her arms spread wide on the beach, an endless expanse of sun and sand and sea cradled within that embrace.

Sima recalled Faye's faith in her, her insistence that she was not barren. Her shop had given her purpose and pride, as Connie had predicted and as Faye had assured her. But Sima knew purpose and pride were not joy, did not send one spinning on the beach, arms flung open in full view. Remembering Faye, Sima remembered a time when she still mourned the death of that prospect of happiness—a time before resignation, before acceptance, a time when she was raw with the loss of love, aching.

Sima wished she could tell Faye how she'd admired her, wished the words didn't always come only after those they were meant for could no longer hear. I lost her, she thought, holding her own gaze in the mirror, I lost her, and I will never have her back. Tears gathered, but as she opened the cabinet door, her face sliding away before her, she recalled too the other woman she'd lost—her own young self, the one filled with longing—and pressed them away. Thank God, she thought as she removed Lev's cholesterol pills, closed the cabinet shut, thank God that's all over. ■

Ilana Stanger-Ross, a 1998 Lilith intern, is a student midwife in Victoria, B.C. A version of this piece appears in her novel Sima's Undergarments for Women *(Overlook).* *© 2009 by Ilana Stanger-Ross. www.ilanastangerross.com*

The *SHEKHINAH SH'MA*:

Six Little Words to Shake the World

ARIADNE JOY LIEBER, PH.D., *tells* RABBI SUSAN SCHNUR *why she's revising Judaism's central prayer*

"LISTEN, ISRAEL,
THE SHEKHINAH IS IN OUR INMOST BEING
[IS AMONG US], THE SHEKHINAH IS ONE"

Sh'ma Yisrael,
ha-Shekhinah b'Kirbainu ha-Shekhinah Ahat

SUSAN SCHNUR: Ariadne, so this Shekhinah Sh'ma popped into your mind full-blown?

ARIADNE LIEBER: Yes. I was praying, and I often pray feeling half-alienated. Here's the traditional Sh'ma: "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is One. Blessed be His glorious kingdom forever and ever." Ichhh.... The words "Lord," "His," "glorious kingdom"—I don't relate to lords and kingdoms. Spiritually, this isn't what I need to say. For goodness sake, it's the 21st century.

SCHNUR: Your doctoral dissertation was on the motif of joy in biblical prophecies, and you're a spiritual intuitive. This makes you an interesting pray-er. Can you walk us through these six little words?

LIEBER: Well, the first two words are unchanged—*"Sh'ma Yisrael"*—but I certainly don't think of translating them as "Hear, O Israel," which is the traditional rendering. That has an administrative sound to me and feels patronizing and anti-me. "Listen, Israel" is much stronger, more open, it's not somebody trying to tell you—trying to tell the one who's praying—what to do. It's a process; listening is deep. It's active. "Listen" means "Stop for a moment. Become absorbed in this." The pray-er will come up with something. "Listen"—I'm getting my own attention here.

SCHNUR: Paying attention is a spiritual act. It's like that magnificent Denise Levertov poem about marriage. One partner says to the other, "You have my attention"—what an exquisite thing to say to the one you love. "You have my attention: which is a tenderness, beyond what I may say." I've done wedding ceremonies where I adapt this poem into nuptial vows.

LIEBER: "Listen, Israel" is also someone else talking to the ancient Israelites, myself among them. It's the eternal me, the big me. It's Everyjew. It's Frankie's "the we of me" from *Member of the Wedding*.

SCHNUR: And Walt Whitman's "I contain multitudes...."

LIEBER: Right. Embracing everything. *"Sh'ma Yisrael"* is an invitation: "Okay, I'm listening, I'm excited. What do you have to say?"

SCHNUR: Well, the next two words: *"Ha-Shekhinah b'kirbainu"*—that God's presence or indwelling is in our inmost being, is among us.

LIEBER: Yes. The Shekhinah is a female naming of God, it's the term for divine immanence; that is, the God within us, circulating all around us, the God in everything. It's not the God over us, it's not that Lord God on a throne.

SCHNUR: The Shekhinah dwells *with* us.

LIEBER: I don't like the word "God." It's a dry word. It's cold. It doesn't do anything for me. It has a masculine sound in my ear. *Gott*. Sort of military. A choppy, cut sound. To be honest, it repels me. Shekhinah takes me further, to a different place. Shekhinah is a spirit, not an image. It's a feeling of divinity all around you. A presence you can't deny, an indwelling. In Chinese, it's your Qi [pronounced "chee"]. And I like "the" Shekhinah—it's an honorific that includes us.

SCHNUR: How are you with "the Lord our God"—*"Adonai Elohainu"*—in the original Sh'ma?

LIEBER: It's so distant. It's out there. Where is this guy? Who cares? There's nothing personal about "the Lord our God." It doesn't locate godliness. Somebody outside of us—a male, maybe Moses—is ordering us ("Hear, O Israel!") to hear that the Lord is our God. Ughh. It's unilateral, uni-directional. My "Listen, Israel" is very internal, it's preparing us for something beautiful, something whispered and inclusive and complete, something so holy.

SCHNUR: It's a mean and frightening world out there, a mutilated world. It's imperative that humanity locates the divine within itself.

LIEBER: Within Herself. Now we come to the fourth word, the fulcrum word: "b'kirbainu"—within us, among us, in our midst, in our inmost being. Wow. We're expressing this to each other. "Hey, it's within us!" It's a revelation. No one told us this before, that it's within us. At Sinai, they made a mistake. They really wanted to see a God. I think the word *"b'kirbainu"* came to me from the prophet Zephaniah: "God is in the midst of thee" is the standard translation [Zephaniah 3:17].

SCHNUR: But Zephaniah goes on to call God the "Mighty One who will save."

LIEBER: Whoa. That does not at all take us where we want to go! We need Oneness, not a One that's Other, who "saves us" from outside of us, who is a separate entity. We're part of the One. I don't want a God who's making something out there, who "forms light and darkness"—a God outside. I am part of God. I don't care if God is male or female, or male *and* female, what I care about is that I am part of God.

SCHNUR: I need to go back to the uni-directional God for a moment, to the God who has a unilateral relationship with us. What if our relationship with that God were really reciprocal—if that God gets changed by our commitment, by our listening? If listening makes us equal? I need to quote the whole Levertov poem, to re-title it "Sh'ma":

> You have my
> attention: which is
> a tenderness, beyond
> what I may say. And I have
> your constancy to
> something beyond myself.
> The force
> of your commitment charges us—we live
> in the sweep of it, taking courage
> one from the other.

LIEBER: Oh, the idea of God taking courage from us is just amazing. There is no God without us; God needs us. When I was working on my dissertation, I found that the biblical God didn't always know what God was supposed to do. In the book of Exodus, God needs Moses' help to find His/Her position. We're still watching the process of God's growth and development, of God's maturation. It hasn't ended. My Sh'ma certainly doesn't declare that God is complete.

SCHNUR: But the last word there—*"Ahat"*—certainly feels summative.

LIEBER: Yes, this is the word that started the Shekhinah Sh'ma for me. It's the feminine form of the word "one." "The Shekhinah is One." And what's wonderful about it, as compared to the masculine form of the word, is that it starts with the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet and ends with the last letter of the alphabet. When I first realized this, while sitting in the library, I was beaming. I'm still beaming!

SCHNUR: It makes you happy.

LIEBER: In the library, I was like a holy fool, a *meshugeneh*, talking to myself and the holy Hebrew letters. We are the beginning and the end. No matter what you do, it comes back to a beginning and an end. *"Ahat"* ties up the package, the doxology. And this alpha-to-omega word, in the feminine, happens to mean "one." And we run all over the place shouting these words: We teach them to our children, and bind them upon our arms and heads, and write them on our doorposts. We put them everywhere so we don't forget.

SCHNUR: "Listen, Israel, the Shekhinah is in our inmost being [is among us], the Shekhinah is One."

LIEBER: Yes. I don't want the traditional Sh'ma, the traditional declaration of faith, posted everywhere. It takes our freedom away; it's belittling. It severs us from ourselves. Women don't want a big God up over us. The Shekhinah Sh'ma meets women where they already naturally are: in dialogue, in reciprocity, in inclusive and eternal oneness. This Sh'ma affirms what's already ours: the prayer within.

SCHNUR: The inside/outside/everything/the earth/all of it.

LIEBER: The "aleph" to "tof"—the A to Z. The One. ■

What Beauty Does

by ALIX KATES SHULMAN

ONE DAY IT HAPPENS, THE DREADED EVENT THAT WILL CHANGE YOUR LIFE, the more dreadful because you don't know what form it will take or when it will occur. To me it happened on July 22, 2004, when my husband of twenty years fell nine feet from a sleeping loft, severely injuring his brain.

Before, he had been a sculptor. After, because of the damage to his frontal cortex, where planning, problem solving, and reasoning occur, he lost his ability to make art. His memory was so impaired that from the day of his fall onward, he was unable to retain new memories for more than a moment. He had no awareness of the accident or the hospital where he'd just spent three months ("What accident?" "What hospital?"). And though he continued to take pleasure from life, especially sensual beauty, he would immediately forget everything about the museum, concert, movie, or visit he had just spent hours enjoying, including that it had occurred. He was as dependent as someone with advanced Alzheimer's. He knew our family, friends, and others from his past, but of those he met after his fall, even caregivers he saw daily, their names and identities never took root, though in time he might come to know their faces. Season, month, year, century no longer registered; throughout the frenzied presidential primaries, he knew who Hillary was (lodged in long-term memory) but not Obama (short-term); and he couldn't find his way home from across the street. Yet behind his monumental confusion, and despite his agitation and sporadic violent outbursts, typical of traumatic brain injury, his precious self remained intact. The sunny optimism, modesty, aesthetic enthusiasm, and loving nature of the man I'd married kept shining through the fog.

Then perhaps I should not have been so surprised when, on a daring trip to Tuscany almost two years after his fall, an object of beauty made the unprecedented leap from short-term memory to long-term in this passionate artist's brain.

Fearing our travels were over, when friends invited us to Tuscany for ten days in May 2006, to share a house they'd rented, I didn't hesitate. I could imagine no better circumstances for traveling with someone in Scott's condition. With Norm driving and Heather navigating, leaving me free to concentrate on Scott, and with Becca, an NYU student, along to assist us, the chances of success would be maximized. Still, I promised myself that if, despite my precautions, the trip was too hard, we'd turn right around and fly home.

"Here we are, darling. Rome!" I announced, as we deplaned.

"Rome? You mean the real Rome?" he said, looking around bewildered, even though I'd spoken of little else for weeks and all night he had raptly followed the plane's progress on the monitor.

We picked up our rental car and set off at once for Tuscany. "Where are we? What country are we in?" Scott repeated at every turn. Despite the signs in Italian, the red tile roofs, the distinctive landscape, he couldn't grasp that we were actually in Italy. Yet Italy was a country we had visited together often, starting in 1984, on the way home from Israel (where he took

me in order to demonstrate his solidarity with my Jewish roots and first proposed marriage), landing in the Rome airport only hours after the El Al counter had been destroyed by a terrorist bomb; and then on our honeymoon in Sicily and Florence four years later, and again every couple of years thereafter.

At last we turned up a narrow road toward a renovated farmhouse perched on a hilltop. The dirt drive was lined with vibrant yellow acacia trees in full spring bloom.

"Will you look at those yellow trees!" cried Scott.

"And they belong to our villa," said Heather.

"Really? They're ours?" He grinned with incredulous joy.

When I'd finished unpacking, I walked into Heather and Norm's room to find Heather sobbing in Norm's arms.

"What is it?" I cried.

Heather shook her head, tears streaming from her eyes. Sheepishly she said, "It's Scott. And you."

I was so used to him, to us, that I'd forgotten how helpless, even tragic, we appeared to others. To me Scott's confusion and disorientation were such old news that what I focused on was his delight at traveling again.

"Don't cry. He's not unhappy. And neither am I—don't you see? We're here in Tuscany. With you. What could be better?"

Though Scott's confusion accompanied us everywhere, that veteran traveler and lifetime member of The Explorers Club was soon in his element. Nothing, not car sickness, fatigue, or disorientation could impede his continual delight. If he was often impatient to leave the restaurant or museum before the rest of us were ready, Becca took him by the hand to a garden or yet another café to sit and talk until the rest of us were ready to join them. Sometimes he expressed his impatience not, as he commonly did since his fall, through agitation, but charmingly, urging us to "move-on-dot-com!" or by singing an invented song, like a drunk near closing time. It was not that his old self had been supplanted, only that a new, less inhibited and flashier layer had been superimposed. But to those of us who knew him well, behind his showy new front he was still Scott, shaky but intact, the tall, sweet, blue-eyed guy who loved—had always loved—traveling.

It was not that his old self had been supplanted, only that a new, less inhibited and flashier layer had been superimposed.

And indeed, with no decisions forced on him, with Norm as driver, Heather and me as cooks, and Becca as personal attendant, what was not to love? He relished the landscape, the villages and towns, the art, the food, the company, and especially those yellow trees, which his extreme memory loss kept as fresh as if each sighting were the first. "Can you come over here when you have a minute, darling? I want to show you something marvelous out the window. Just look at that yellow tree. Isn't it incredible?"

We arrived back in New York at midnight. The following day, after a long sleep, Scott said excitedly, "We forgot to bring something home from Tuscany. Something very important."

"We did?" I asked, stunned that he recalled we'd been away. "What?"

"A yellow tree!"

That he remembered being in Tuscany was astounding enough; that he remembered the acacia trees seemed nothing short of miraculous. His artist's eye had brought home across an ocean, from past to present, at least one vivid image in living color. To me it marked a turning point, a milestone of recall and recovery—which made me declare the trip a complete success.

A memory is a set of neural connections among brain cells. Sometimes the failure to remember something occurs because it can't be retrieved and sometimes because it wasn't properly encoded to begin with. Little is known about the process by which memories are laid down, or how a short-term memory is converted to long-term, becoming electrochemically hardwired. But it is known that whether a given set of connections is made permanent sometimes depends upon emotions—otherwise you wouldn't remember the once-glimpsed face of your rival longer than that of your waiter, or be forever haunted by certain embarrassing moments—which may help to explain Scott's astonishing recall of our Tuscan adventure.

After Heather emailed us photos of the trip, Scott wouldn't stop looking at them. I put up an image of red tile roofs, taken from the highest point of the village, as my screensaver, then mounted prints in an album, which immediately became his favorite book. He looked at it endlessly, commenting on each image. A few weeks later, looking at the album, he crowed, "What a trip that was! I seem to have come out of my shell on that trip. Glorious photos! Wonderful trip!" The pictures even sparked memories of things of which there were no photos, like Norm's speeding up and down the hills, the grazing sheep, dogs barking at their heels.

Thinking back on that trip, undertaken as a risky experiment, for me too it was surprisingly no less gratifying than many another. All travel may be expansive, but that trip set a precedent for us by stretching the limits of what I thought possible to do with the new, impaired Scott.

With an artist companion's help, Scott, who had attempted no art for ages, made two pastel drawings of the yellow trees, using the photos as inspiration. And for many months, whenever we saw Norm and Heather, he asked if one day we could all go back to Tuscany. His memory of the adventure successfully and uniquely made the leap from short-term to long-term.

Was this tremendous achievement a result of ordinary healing over time (approaching two years), or perhaps of his intense, unexpected pleasure, rendering it unforgettable? Now, two years further on, his memory has not improved; in fact, it has worsened, and circumstances have made it impossible for me to dare another trip with him. Yet the memories of those ten days in Tuscany and those vibrant yellow trees remain a permanent tribute to the potent effect of strong pleasurable emotions and of the healing power of beauty. ■

Alix Kates Shulman is the author of 12 books, including the iconic Memoirs of an Ex-Prom Queen. *A version of this piece appears in* To Love What Is *by Alix Kates Shulman, published by Farrar, Straus and Giroux, LLC.* *Copyright © 2008 by Alix Kates Shulman. All rights reserved.*

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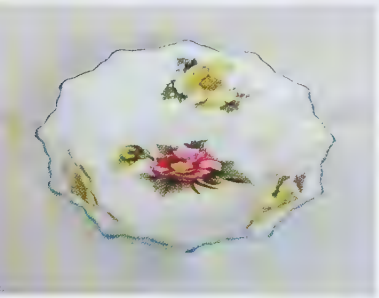


Daughters on Mothers

The story that never goes away

Every year Lilith receives hundreds of unsolicited manuscripts which teach us invaluably about the cultural moment, about what's on the fine minds—and in the discerning hearts—of Jewish women. The late '80s saw an influx of "Bubbie and Me" memoirs, for example, and the early '90s a flood of Holocaust autobiography. Of late we're experiencing a heavy volume, as they say when they put you on hold, of daughters writing about their mothers. Unlike the "Bubbie and Me" stories that were motivated by unconditional love, these essays are often the stuff of criticism and anguish. We started to feel that a Jaws of Life was in order to separate us from our mothers.

I asked my female ob-gyn the other day whether her pregnant patients prefer the prospect of male or female babies. "They want boys," she said unequivocally. "A lot of women seem to go through a period where they're afraid to have a daughter. They say, 'It's too intense,' or 'How will I know where I stop and she begins?' or 'Daughters judge their mothers so harshly.'" And what do they say about having a boy? I ask her. "That it feels safer emotionally, that male oblivion makes boys more accepting; they don't dissect their mothers."

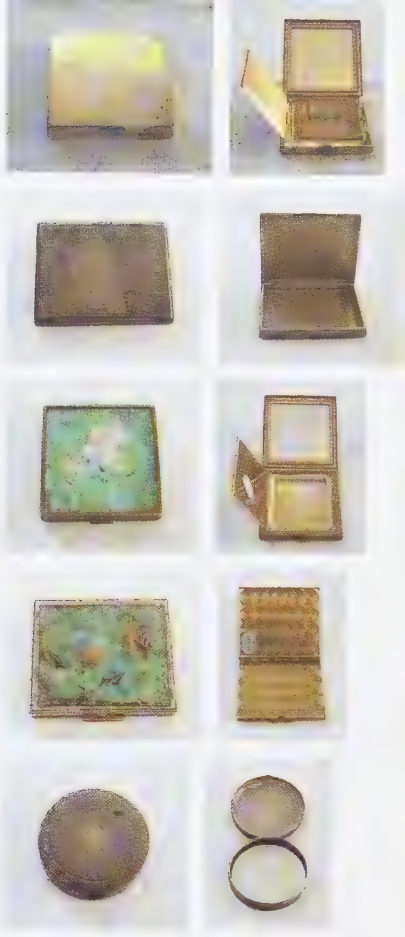
We seined through a lot of manuscripts to choose the six that appear here; in all, the Jewish content is inseparable from the mother-daughter relationship. Two stories, by Laurie Mozian and Esther Moritz, are about coming of age against the backdrop of strong Jewish mothers; two, by Amy Katz and Rebecca Himber Berg, limn the intense emotional partnerships between mother and daughter in the absence of men; two, by Berg and Evie Litwok, are about desperately, magically wanting to compensate Mom for her losses; and one, by Eva White, is about the huge nexus of meaning that falls away in the absence of a mom. Five memoirs unfold in dramatic Jewish loci: during Purim, while saying Kaddish, in the 19th-century shtetl, in the wake of the Holocaust, in the mikveh. Most of the manuscripts, during the editing process, became more empathic and less angry towards Mom. Two authors said to me, "Wow, editing is like therapy."

RABBI SUSAN SCHNUR

IN THESE PAGES, RONIT SHANY, PHOTOGRAPHER IN TEL AVIV, DOCUMENTS HER MOTHER'S POSSESSIONS. "One year ago, after my mother died—my father died four years ago—I started opening drawers in my parents' apartment in Haifa. I was surprised to find that my mother had kept everything. My bedroom is the same color; nothing at all had been thrown out, had changed. I wanted to open another drawer and another. Their home was like from another era. I started photographing things; I made typologies of a time past: teacups, hats, make-up compacts. It is very very quiet there. The emptiness is good for me.

"We are three sisters, we each have the key to the apartment. It's so simple. I go there from Tel Aviv. I open the windows. Nothing has moved. It is all waiting for me. I take out the objects, photograph them, put them back. It's almost like my mother is still living there.

"I'm an art-photographer—these images will be part of a one-woman exhibition (museumeinharod.org.il). The project changed me. It was another way to say goodbye to my mother. Only after I finished photographing could I see what was in the apartment."



Fated To Be Ahead of Her Time

by AMY KATZ

MY MOTHER'S *TALLIT* RESTED HEAVY AND LOPSIDED AROUND MY SHOULDERS, PINK FRINGES TICKLING MY KNEES. I was standing before the congregation, reading from the Torah for the first time in 14 years. It was the 10th anniversary of Mom's *yahrtzeit*; she had died from cancer at 61, when I was 26. I was ill-at-ease in a tallit—especially in hers—but I wore it to honor her memory. My mother's tallit had meant a great deal to her.

I had once been a regular Torah reader at Camp Ramah in Wisconsin—in the pheromone-soaked air of Jewish summer camp, reading Torah was an actual way to *flirt*—but in the years that followed I had felt no particular compulsion to prepare and chant passages of Torah. I certainly spent years *struggling* with Jewish texts, though, and with Judaism more generally. I practiced yoga, studied Torah in Israel, became a Jew-Bu, explored the Havurah world, Orthodoxy and everything in between. Eventually, though, I returned to the cozy place where I'd begun. My husband and children and I have found a home at Congregation Neveh Shalom in Portland, Oregon, which is eerily similar to Congregation Beth Shalom in Kansas City, the Conservative synagogue where both Mom and I grew up. So here I was at Neveh Sholom, chanting Torah. If Mom were alive, I thought, she'd be 71; she'd be wearing this tallit.

my tallit-wearing mom

Curiously enough, the tallit that was making me so uncomfortable was one that I myself had bought for my mother. She had "taken on the mitzvah of tallit" the year that she said Kaddish for her father, knowing that "taking on a mitzvah" means no turning back—she was committing to praying in a tallit for a lifetime. My mother loved dressing well, so I shopped for her tallit using the same methodology I would use when buying her a sweater, say, or a purse. The tallit had to be pretty (she would never have donned a *tallis* off a rack!); it had to match her shoes and suits; it had to complement her dyed-blond hair and hazel eyes. Such a tallit was impossible to find in Kansas City circa 1993, however, so Mom turned to me.

I was living in L.A. at the time where pastel-striped, pink-fringed *tallitot* filled the shelves of synagogue gift shops and the Judaica stores that lined the Pico-Robertson neighborhood. I shopped for a long time, and finally chose a creamy beige tallit, topped with pink and baby-blue crocheted stripes, made of lightweight wool. The atarah, against her neck, was a sheer sensuous swath of emerald green satin, a shade that I knew would look beautiful against her eyes. She loved it, and wore it every day for 11 months, standing beside her brother in the dark chapel of Beth Shalom, glorifying God's name and remembering her father, Isadore Gale—who was 90 years old when he died. She loved him like she had as a little girl, and missed him that way, furiously and purely. "*...asher kidshanu b'mitzvotav vetzivanu l'hitatef ba-tzitzit*," she'd whisper as she wrapped herself tightly, enclosing herself in a pretty package of sadness. When the prescribed period of mourning was over, she continued to wear her tallit every Shabbat until she died. To Mom, a prayer garment—even one with pink fringes—bespoke a serious commitment.

MOM WAS THE FIRST WOMAN IN HER CONGREGATION TO WEAR A TALLIT, but others in the synagogue were not far behind. These women had seen all manner of tallitot while visiting their children, who, like me, had left Kansas City for more cosmopolitan adventures in Boston, San Francisco and New York. (Interestingly, the pioneers I saw donning tallitot in these places were not women my age, but rather feminists in my mother's generation—my cohort had not yet taken the practice up.) Back in Kansas City, changes came more slowly, and my mother—soft-spoken and easily intimidated—became Beth Shalom's unlikely pre-eminent Jewish feminist.

"She was the first bat mitzvah in Kansas City," my grandmother never tired of reminding everyone. When women were allowed on the bimah, Mom was the first one there, and the first to read Torah. She was also one of the first female Hebrew teachers at Beth Shalom, and she took classes at the Jewish Theological Seminary (while studying at Barnard) long before J.T.S. admitted women to any of its programs. She was a woman, though, sadly, fated to be ahead of her time—a fact that challenged her daily. She met and married my father while he was a rabbinical student at J.T.S., but she was not cut out for the role of rebbetzin as defined in the late 1950s and early '60s. If the world had been different, she most certainly would have studied to become a rabbi. She was bookish, and loved erudition and prayer. Instead, she followed my father from city to city, pulpit to pulpit, chafing at the expectation that she serve on decorating committees, and cook and host large Shabbat dinners. She swallowed her Jewish soul for quite a while, and focused on a career as a business (and then a university) librarian, and on raising her family. After my parents divorced, Mom and I moved back to Kansas City.

It smelled like Oil of Olay and L'Oreal hair dye and Beth Shalom. I was afraid I might never take it off.

At Beth Shalom my mother became both a regular reader and a gabbai. She formed a committee to convince the congregation to include the *imahot* (the names of the biblical foremothers in addition to the forefathers) as part of the first blessing in the Amidah. She wrote impassioned articles on women's issues for the Jewish Chronicle and proudly displayed an orange on her Seder plate. She led a Shabbat afternoon women's text-study group, and got a master's degree in Jewish history.

When my brothers and sister and I were cleaning out her bedroom—exactly 30 days after she died—I found her beloved tallit tucked safely in my grandfather's blue velvet tallis bag. It was in her walk-in closet, mingling on a low shelf with her various other Shabbos accessories: high heels, hats and purses that she reserved for synagogue use only. She owned the tallit for three years, and spent every single one of those *Shabbatot* wrapped in its warmth. I tried it on. It smelled like Oil of Olay and L'Oreal hair dye and Beth Shalom. It smelled like her. I was afraid I would never take it off.

I TRIED MOURNING FOR MY MOTHER THE WAY THAT SHE HAD FOR GRANDPA. Newly married and living in Boston, I looked for a synagogue where I might stand in my mother's tallit and declare faith in a God Whom I was none too happy with. For the first 30 days, I prayed daily, but for the remaining months I cut back to only three or four times a week. I was saying Kaddish for *her*, because I knew that she would have wanted me to, but the experience was painful; that's why I cut back. The others at Kehilith Israel's daily minyan were all older, my mother's age, and many of the women reminded me a little bit of Mom. They were saying Kaddish for their parents, which only magnified my sense of too-early loss.

For their part, the minyan-goers seemed to have a hard time with my presence, too. I imagined that, when they looked at me, they saw their own daughters—that my tragedy pushed them to envision their own deaths. Many of the female *davveners* wore dainty tallitot, and, at the beginning, I wore my mom's. But I gave that up quickly, as it made me feel unbearably sad. Wrapped in my loss, my lips could hardly form the comforting Aramaic syllables of the Kaddish. And so I left the garment home, encased in Grandpa's blue velvet. At the end of the year, I stored the tallis bag on a high shelf in my closet. Ten years would pass before I reached for it.

I DON'T WEAR A TALLIT—ANY TALLIT—BECAUSE IT RUSTLES UP MEMORIES OF GRIEVING: MOM GRIEVING HER DAD; MY GRIEVING HER. My mother and I were close, the kind of parent and child who enjoy each other's company. We spoke on the phone several times a week, loved nothing more than an afternoon of shopping together (I can't tell you how many times we high-tailed it out of services on Shabbat afternoon to hit the Saturday sales at Dillard's), savored long evenings at gourmet restaurants. We giggled and talked about our sex lives. She was the only person in the world brave enough to tell me that, yes, I do actually look fat in white pants. When I put on a tallit, I am painfully reminded that she's gone—my mother, my friend. And when I put words to paper, everything comes back to this loss.

But I also don't wear a tallit for a second reason: because the real gift my mother and her generation of Jewish feminists gave me and my cohort was the right—in so many contexts—to *choose*. And to me, no matter how pink the fringes, how satiny and gorgeous the stripes, a tallit is a *male* ritual object. Instead of adding feminine twists to traditionally male elements of Judaism, I am drawn to that which is more traditionally feminine and maternal. I love cleaning like mad for Shabbat, baking the world's most perfect challah with my seven-year-old daughter Mira (named for my mother, Marilyn), and cooking and hosting crowded and noisy Shabbat dinners. I "took on the mitzvah" of challah-baking as thoroughly as Mom "took on the mitzvah" of tallit. I chose to be on the synagogue's decorating committee, finding swatch-dithering a meaningful endeavor. I use a little white puppet named Shabbos Mouse to tell silly stories during Tot Shabbat; I teach Hebrew School, whereas my mother's interests were scholarly. Like my mother's tallit, my Judaism is unapologetically feminine.

It was tremendously difficult to wear Mom's tallit when I stood in front of the Torah for the first time in 14 years, chanting in honor of her life. Yet I loved publicly connecting with the words, mulling them over, seeing their majestic

presence in the scroll. I liked it so much that the next day I called the synagogue office asking to be put on the rotation of regular readers.

MY DAUGHTER MIRA WILL BE A BAT MITZVAH IN SIX-AND-A-HALF YEARS. Someday *she'll* perhaps "take on the mitzvah" of wearing my mother's tallit. Maybe I'll be chanting from the Torah on that day, thinking if Mom were alive she'd see her hazel-eyed granddaughter wearing her perfect tallit.

Amy Katz is the mother of Mira, 7, and Eli, 5. She is a Jewish educator and writer living in Portland, Oregon. She wears a synagogue-owned tallit when she reads Torah which she inevitably removes as soon as she's off the bimah.

Only One of Us Can Wear This Dress, Ma

by LAURIE DEUTSCH MOZIAN

THE YEAR WAS 1956. My family lived in a public housing project in Astoria, Queens, a working-class melting pot fifteen minutes and a thousand miles from Manhattan. It took all week to get ready for the Purim celebration at our shul, an event that loomed large in my seven-year-old life. That year, Purim loomed large in our community's life, too, as we'd just moved into our newly built synagogue and it was to be our first celebration. Many of the children's fathers had been soldiers who'd fought against Hitler in Europe. Even I understood that Purim that year marked a victory against more than one Haman.

my seamstress mom

My mother was making my costume, as she did most of my clothes. Adults used to tell me how lucky I was to have a mother who sewed clothes for me, but I silently really disagreed. My eyes would devour the windows of The Lerner Shop on Steinway Street, the major shopping area in our neighborhood. I longed for the garments that other girls obtained so easily, not having to stand still endlessly, as I did for fittings, not having to get pricked by pins.

I also envied other girls getting to choose their own clothes, as I ceded to my mother how I got portrayed to the world. By sewing my clothes, my mother—a willful person, to say the least—had one more means of making me her creation. On top of that, she never finished an outfit on time—never more than five minutes before I had to walk out the door—a circumstance that made me anxious and unhappy. Invariably I left our apartment in tears, yet the women who assembled on the benches outside our building never seemed to notice. Instead they would seize me as I got off the elevator, clucking in amazement over the breadth of my mother's talent. Lifting the hem, they'd inspect the uniformity of my mother's tiny stitches. Pulling my skirt up, they'd check to see whether she'd made underpants to match. At an early age, I felt that I knew what it was like to be a model; it was terrible.

THE WEEK BEFORE PURIM THAT YEAR, MOM SEWED AND SEWED whenever she wasn't busy "keeping house." In project mode, the floor was soon strewn with thread and pins and multicolored birds' nests of selvage. When I arrived home from school each day, she would direct me to undress for a fitting.

As I stood and turned in the gown, my mother's real agenda cranked up in earnest.

"Have you decided who you're going to be this year?" she asked, for the costume she had crafted—an A-line, floor-length gown of golden-yellow pique cotton with an exotic-looking bib-like trim—was for a *generic* queen: the exact queen I was going to be, either Esther or Vashti, was still open to question. My mother, who was trained in couture, believed that well-made garments should closely hug the body; she therefore spent lots of time fitting the gown to my round little body like a sausage skin.

"I'm going to be Queen Esther," I said decidedly. Esther was, after all, the unrivaled heroine of the Purim story, and far-and-away the most popular choice.

"Now why would you want to be Esther?" my mother started in. "All the girls will be Esther. Why do you think your grandparents came to this country, Laurie? For freedom of choice. So that *you* could be an individual. Don't follow the pack. Think for yourself."

I am thinking for myself, I silently reasoned—if I let you decide *for* me, Mom, where is the freedom in that?

"Why don't you be Vashti?" she wheedled.

I girded myself for the struggle. I vehemently did not want to be Queen Vashti, King Ahashuerus's first wife. In my mind, Vashti played a very minor role in a story that was really all about Esther's beauty and bravery. My mother, though, argued in favor of Vashti's strength of character; she argued on and on. I stood quietly, in a familiar, but precarious, position. Speaking my mind, I knew, would only beget more argument, and I needed my mother to finish the gown already, so that when Purim came we could get out the door. I smiled at her vaguely, and kept changing the subject.

"Why do you think your grandparents came to this country, Laurie? So that you *could be an* individual."

FINALLY THE BIG DAY CAME. I donned the costume, and my father adjusted the F stop on his camera, moving me around the room to get good light.

"You look like an Egyptian princess," he said. "She looks gorgeous already," he shouted to my mother. "Let's go!"

We bustled out the door, my mother still straightening the seams that were leaving ridges in my chubby torso. The elevator was her last chance to work me.

"When it's your turn at the microphone, Laurie, darling, don't forget to say who you are. Loud and clear," she said. "You want to stand out, not be one of the unthinking herd."

I nodded, catching my father's eye. Where my mother was concerned, we both knew how to make our lives easier.

We arrived at the spanking new synagogue, and I ascended the *bimah*—we were using it as a stage—and got in line next to Sharon Sumliner. We were both nervous and fidgety.

"You're stepping on my scarf," Sharon said.

"Sorry." I looked at my foot, which was placed squarely on the trailing corner of her gauzy, mauve head-wrap.

From our perch on the bimah we could see the grownups looking ahead at us and then around at the sanctuary and then back at us. They were almost glowing. I sensed that what we were doing was important—being up there in America as we waited to take our turns, to walk across the stage, face the crowd and speak decisively into the microphone. Building the shul had been a big accomplishment for Jews living in public housing—bearing children in a safe land, carrying on our faith. Even I, at seven, felt the triumph.

The line thinned to me, I crossed the stage, and a lady held the microphone in front of me.

"And look who we have here! Laurie Deutsch, isn't she beautiful? Now who are you dressed up to be?"

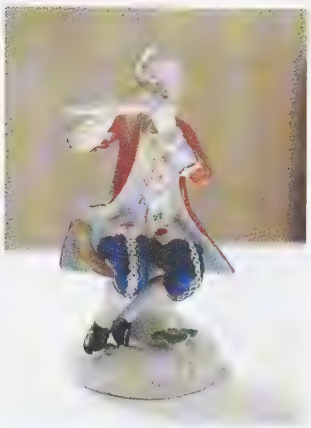
I smiled extra sweetly and locked eyes with my mother, my personal Haman.

"I'm Queen Esther," I said loud and clear, "*Malka Hadassah*."

My mother's jaw dropped and then she beamed.

She had gotten her Vashti, and so had I.

Laurie Deutsch Mozian, author of Foods that Fight Disease, *is a nutritionist living with her husband in Ulster County, New York.*



"If Hitler Didn't Kill Me, You Will"

by EVIE LITWOK WITH SUSAN SCHNUR

I WAS AWARE, FROM A VERY EARLY AGE, THAT MY PARENTS WERE SURVIVORS OF THE HOLOCAUST. My mother survived labor camps and Auschwitz, while my father miraculously lived through 14 concentration camps. Most of the Jewish survivors of the Holocaust were teens, and when the war ended, they were placed in deportation camps where they made lifelong friends. My parents met each other at one of these camps, in Austria, as well as an extended group of around 50 young Jews who remained amazingly close for the next 60 years. As none of these survivors had any family—with

my disappointed mom

the exception of my father's parents, who survived the war in Siberia—we children called one another "cousin," and felt so. Our parents by extension became each other's "uncles" and "aunts." Since the only grandparents in the group belonged to my brother and me, my grandparents were everyone's. In July and August the whole swarming group of us would take over a bungalow colony in the Catskill Mountains of New York; those summers are my most precious memories.

The spirit of these particular teenage survivors was intense and indomitable. They felt, perhaps unconsciously, that they faced a choice: either to live their days disfigured by their trauma, or to defeat Hitler by "choosing life." We children, as a group, were inducted into our parents' collective philosophy: "We're here. We're okay. We pay Hitler back by having you"—a familiar, but, oh my God, complicated teaching. And we heard the stories they chose to tell, which were largely of life Before. My mother talked often about hailing from a well-to-do family of textile manufacturers; Kohanim—priests, descended from the biblical Aaron. I was told that my great-grandfathers, who were brothers, had long beards. Parents made genealogical charts for their children. "Here is everyone in the family who went to the beach with us," my mother would explain.

Their philosophy aside, however, the horrors oozed. In my experience, first-born females, like myself, were particularly vulnerable to picking up every feeling, every look, every sigh. My mother caught me one night, at age 8, reading *Mein Kampf* under the covers; what kind of third-grader does that? At 10,

my eagle eye spotted a swastika on the cover of my little brother's notebook. I quickly discerned the culprit, beat him up—he was much taller than me—and dragged him over to his dad. "If I ever see a swastika anywhere in the neighborhood," I told the boy's father, "I will kill your son." I had *no fear*.

A turning point for me came in high school when, after a fight with my mother, I blurted out, "I hate you." My mother's response silenced me—well, for years. Through decades of therapy.

"At least you have a mother," she shot back. "I don't even have a photograph of mine."

I cried hysterically after that, for hours. I couldn't imagine anything more horrible. To this day, I take tons of photos of my family; I mail them to everyone. I must have 10,000 pictures. After hurricane Katrina, I was aware of how many people said that their greatest regret was losing photographs. I remember what my mother said when she was interviewed for Steven Spielberg's Holocaust project—that the Nazis had given her family 15 minutes to leave their house and that her father, allowed to take one thing, chose an alarm clock. I tried to imagine my grandfather worried that he wouldn't wake up in the morning. I would have taken photographs.

After the "I hate you" incident, I resolved never again to cause my mother any pain. Proud of her always, I became even more so; I became her bragging mother. Having only finished sixth grade, she was self-taught in the world. She was an avid reader; she was attractive, creative, courageous, witty. She was funny as hell. I put myself second, and struggled to define a separate me.

I watched my parents' marriage with awe. They flirted with each other, held hands, were each other's best friend. Their relationship became my model; any relationship short of it was not good enough. And I saw my parents' extensive lifelong friendships. Surely I would grow up to be surrounded in this way. I was proud of myself for my maturity, for understanding the value of commitment.

AFTER THE VIETNAM WAR, MY PARENTS' RELATIONSHIP TO THEIR OWN EXPERIENCE OF GENOCIDE SHIFTED RADICALLY. Returning veterans had started telling their stories, and it moved my parents and their friends to begin telling theirs. My parents began speaking at high schools and community colleges, and I remember being blown away by how articulate they were. I would sometimes attend these talks and be shocked by the reaction of my peers; it pried open for me a whole new way to see my parents. I heard new, painful stories. I often wept and felt overwhelmed.

My parents' coda during these talks never varied: *"You must never forget the people who suffered and died, whose only crime was to be born Jewish. Respect everyone no matter what their religion, color or belief. Yours is the generation that has to listen. If there are acts of injustice, it's your job to make the world respond immediately."* My parents were socially and politically progressive. My mother's best friend was a gay survivor. As a child, I remember my mother supporting a girl who was getting an illegal abortion. After school, my house was the place where everyone hung out—even kids who weren't close to me—because my mother was the grownup everyone talked to. She was magnetic, tolerant, humane, an intuitive guidance counselor.

IN 1975—I WAS 24—MY PARENTS VISITED ME IN MY APARTMENT IN PHILADELPHIA. While my fathe was parking the car, my mother came upstairs and caught me crying. "What's wrong?" she said compassionately. "I just broke up with my lover, a woman," I said. My mother spat on the floor. "If Hitler didn't kill me," she said, "you will."

She stormed out of the apartment, and we had no contact for almost a year, though she did "send" my father to meet me at the Cherry Hill Diner every week, and I knew that she grilled him when he got home: How did Evie look? What was she wearing? What did she have for dinner? Did she have makeup on?—I'm talking details. A young cousin's brain tumor finally

Why do you love all gay people except for me?

ended our impasse, as my parents started coming to Philly every weekend to give him platelets, and they stayed with me. It had been made amply clear to me that if I wanted to be close to my mother, if I wanted to find a place for myself in our larger survivor "family," I would have to pretend to have no romantic life. Otherwise, I would be making my mother suffer, something I found unbearable.

For the next 20 years—even though I had an enduring romantic relationship during that period—I went to family events alone. I sat through countless bar mitzvahs and weddings, pretending to be a workaholic feminist with no time for dating or romance. I would enter a state of depersonalization, entirely cut off from myself. I watched my "cousins" marry and have children, after each celebration crying my way back to Manhattan. In the car, I'd struggle to reclaim myself, to remember who I was. Everyone knew I was a lesbian—but they were in Holocaust families, too, and they acceded to the terms of the arrangement.

My mother and I did well, more or less, as long as the topic of my lesbianism remained unbroached. My father died, and I entered a deep depression. He had been my buffer, my ally. I often laughed bitterly about the fact that my mother and I could speak about the Holocaust—that unspeakable Hell—but never about my girlfriends. Still, I had sympathy for my mother. She came to this country and everything had to be perfect—children had to be perfect—in order to keep Hitler away. There were a lot of secrets in our extended clan; it was simply a price we had to pay.

Still, my lesbianism, my relationship with Jill, did not fall into the category of "Don't ask, don't tell," because it simmered so close to the surface.

If we had a fight about anything, my mother would yell, "You lesbian bastard, how could you do this to me?" Once, while yelling this, she hit me. The next moment she purred, "Now come upstairs, I made your favorite salad."

"You think I want to eat with you?" I said, disgusted.

"Come upstairs," she said. The fight was done. It was out of her system. I was devastated, but I ate with her. I was a mess for days.

Sometimes she would say, "Hitler killed my family. They were kohanim and proud. They are rolling in their graves because of you. You have disgraced them."

"Why do you love all gay people except for me?" I would shout back, weeping.

"Because you're my daughter."

I AM 57 YEARS OLD, AND SOMETIMES I SEE CLEARLY THAT I HAVE NOT YET BEGUN LIVING MY OWN LIFE. I live with the unshakable sense that I have not done my part; I am a disappointment; I have failed her. My not having children is something that enrages my mother. I understand her rage, doubtless too well. My being a lesbian is simply too shattering for her.

Sometimes I tell myself, "My mother truly loves me, but you can only love as much as you can love."

I am able to love a lot more.

Evie Litwok was born and raised in New York City. She studied piano at Carnegie Mellon, earned a graduate degree in psychology, and devoted years to the women's movement and Wall Street. Her devotion to her five Maltese dogs led her to write The Tippy Story, *a book and film. She is at work on a memoir.*

Submergence

by ESTHER MORITZ

I SUBMERGED. THE WARM WATER SURROUNDED ME IN A VELVETY-SMOOTH EMBRACE AND PENETRATED MY SKIN, SOFTENING MY CLENCHED MUSCLES. I had been braced for the icy cold swimming pool of my childhood, the one that made me shiver and cough and choke, chlorine burning in my nostrils. But, happily, this was more like a giant bathtub and I could remain under this water for as long as I could keep my nose pinched closed with the vise of my thumb and index finger.

my panicky mom

Before today I had always kept my head safely above water, except for one disastrous underwater experience when I was a child. My mother, who had been hovering nearby, pulled the coughing and sputtering eight-year-old me out of the pool, away from the swimming teacher's confident arms. The teacher protested, "She will be fine. She was getting it . . . she just swallowed a little water."

"A little water, humph!" My mother was indignant and her hands shook as she wrapped my sunburned body tightly in a rough towel. "The poor child almost drowned!" After that, she decreed that I would not have any more swimming lessons. But her decree was not without guilt and a lot of one-sided discussion with my father. I know the Torah commands that parents teach their children to swim, she told my father. But surely parents had to draw a line. After all, Esther had almost drowned and surely the Torah did not want parents to lose their children over this swimming thing. Yes, children who almost drowned were surely exempt from the rule, she reasoned. My father nodded silently.

My mother told the persistent swimming instructor "a harmless white lie" to get her to stop calling. The doctor had prohibited me from further lessons because of a breathing condition I had developed, she said.

Now that I was an adult, my mother fully expected me to manage in this pool, the *mikveh* (or ritual bath). According to her, I owed my very existence to the mikveh. I heard her tell the story many times about how her first pregnancy ended in miscarriage because she didn't go. But then, Rabbi Seruya "reminded" her that the Torah requires married women to go to the mikveh each and every month. And he was right! As soon as she started going, she conceived. And I was a healthy baby. So, according to my mother, swimming in the mikveh was compulsory to prevent the death of a child—my child, yet un-conceived.

I CAME BACK TO THE SURFACE AND SAW THE MIKVEH LADY STANDING ABOVE ME, WATCHING AS THE WATER PURIFIED EVERY CREVICE OF MY BODY. I noticed her skin, withered and wrinkled, and wondered if she spent all of her spare time soaking in the pool. I imagined a smile spreading slowly on her face as she lowered her small body down the steps, knowing she had a full hour or maybe two before her next client. I imagined her floating weightlessly in the pool on her stomach, then on her back, her body in total harmony with the water. I saw her reluctantly returning to a vertical position and slowly getting out of the pool, her skin hanging down with the weight of the water.

The mikveh lady's serious face peering at me pulled me out of my daydream as I saw she was motioning for me to go under again. I pinched my nose and submerged for the second time.

I had no intention of doing this every month of my married life as the Torah commands. In fact, at the moment, I was here under false pretenses, maybe even contaminating the water. You see, Jewish law instructs that a married woman or bride-to-be wait a full week after her period is completely gone before using the mikveh. An Orthodox bride plans her wedding around her men-

strual cycle, selecting a date that will allow her to go to the mikveh on the night before the wedding. She will then visit the mikveh every month of her married life—except during pregnancy—until menopause. Each month she is forbidden to have sexual contact with her husband for a span of almost two weeks, from the time her period starts until she has purified herself in the ritual bath.

I had planned my wedding so that it would fall on winter break, not even attempting to time it to my cycle. I was in my third year of law school and my studies were my first priority. Besides, at this point, I was most definitely not an Orthodox woman.

I told my Orthodox mother "harmless white lies," but they were not harmless to me.

So what was I doing here? I wasn't sure. But I had come happily and without protest. I had observed even the tiniest rituals, removing every trace of make-up and nail polish, cutting my nails and carefully cleaning behind my ears. I had allowed the shriveled mikveh lady to make sure I had done a good job. She inspected my naked body, front and back, and peered up into my face before nodding her approval. I was clean, as far as she could see. Thankfully, she did not ask when I had stopped bleeding. Had I told her I had only stopped bleeding the day before, she would not have allowed me to enter the sacred water. And I did not want to tell any lies. Not any more. Over the last several years, since I had quietly rejected Orthodox Judaism, I had told too many.

After a late night at the law library my mother would ask, "What did you eat for dinner?"

"I got food from a vegetarian restaurant. A vegetable stir-fry and rice," I would stammer.

She didn't approve of me eating in non-kosher restaurants but she remained silent because at least it was only vegetables. She knew that I had strayed. I was in law school studying till all hours of the night while her friends' daughters were at home, sleeping next to their husbands after tucking in their four or five children. I socialized with goyim, non-Jews, some of whom my mother suspected might even be gay. (Some were.) I went out without breakfast, preferring to pick up coffee and a bagel from a store that sold unkosher products. That was enough to bring her silent, steady disapproval. I couldn't tell her that on late nights I usually ate chicken lo-mein from the Chinese restaurant on 12th Street and 6th Avenue; that I wondered what shrimp tasted like and was planning to try it as soon as I felt courageous enough; that it was dumb luck that I fell in love with a man who, though not Orthodox himself, was from an Orthodox family—it could have been anybody.

She never asked. And I did not tell. Where necessary, I would tell her "a harmless white lie." It was a farce that we had constructed together—a lifesaving buoy to keep my mother from plunging into the depths of her fear. The only problem was that the "harmless white lies" that kept her afloat were starting to bubble up acid-like in my stomach.

I came to the surface and took a grateful gulp of air. The mikveh lady was standing closer, one hand on the metal rail at the edge of the pool. Her eyes were darting back and forth. For one impossible moment, I thought she knew. I looked down at the water—had I bloodied it? No. There was no pink tinge. The water was still sparkling clear, pure and welcoming.

She bent over to speak to me. "Blow out of your nose when you are under," she said, her Yiddish accent thick. "You do not need to hold nose."

I decided to try. I took a deep, hungry breath, my chest swelling out as though with pride. I mentally prepared myself to submerge for the final time and resolved to let my breath out under the water without letting water into my nose. The worst that could happen would be a little cough or sputter. I could do this as I could have years ago, if I had only managed to break free of my mother's frightened grasp. I gathered my faith and submerged. I slowly let air out of my nose creating a dancing cluster of perfect spheres. Bubbles. Of course. I watched as they calmly made their way up to the surface.

Tomorrow I would move out of my parents' Orthodox household and proceed to a life I would share with the man that I had chosen. A man who would support me as we coughed and sputtered our way through our merged lives, figuring out together how to embrace the depths of our Judaism without surrendering to fear.

I followed my bubbles to the surface and gulped hungrily at the air. The mikveh lady was sitting back with a satisfied look on her wrinkled face. She motioned for me to come out of the pool and held up a fluffy white towel for me to wrap myself in. I noticed her shining eyes for the first time. They were the color of the ocean.

Esther Moritz is a freelance writer living in Austin, Texas. The mother of Alexis, 17, and Jesse, 14, she embraces Reform Judaism, swims laps in the Texas heat, and only occasionally swallows water.

Left Behind

by EVA WHITE

I WAS ABOUT TO HAVE MY HAIR TRIMMED. A new young woman replaced my usual hairdresser. It would be the first time I'd had a black hairdresser.

"You needn't worry," the young woman said. "At hairdressing school there was no black hair to learn on. Only hair like yours."

Only hair like yours. I left the salon with that phrase turning over in my head. The hairdresser had seen me as white, with hair just like everyone else's. It wasn't so when I was a child.

my absent mom

I'd felt different from the other children in the small town where I lived. I didn't have a name for it. I couldn't say—it's because I'm _____, that's why I'm different. I didn't understand what it was about me.

"Look at her hair. Fiddlehead frizz," they called out. "She never brushes her hair. Don't you have a comb?" the children taunted me. Some called it "nigger hair."

It wasn't "nigger hair." My best friend Dolores had "black hair" and hers was not the same as mine. "Nappy head," they called Dolores.

I scorned those children. My hair was the same as my father's hair. Dark brown and really curly, and I wore it short. After my father showered he'd put on a net to restrain his curls. I let my curls curl. I didn't want to be like the others anyway. They were rude to the teachers. They had fist fights. Even the girls.

Before we moved to our small town, we'd lived in Chicago. It was when my father lost his job that everything started to go wrong. Every day my father would go out looking for work.

My mother "lost her nerves." That's what the doctors called it.

When he came home I could tell he hadn't found a job. There was a muscle in his cheek that didn't stop twitching.

After a while we fell behind in the rent. Now my mother stayed in bed. It wasn't long before the apartment was taken away. We had no relatives to help us. "Left behind" is what happened to our relatives when my mother and father "got out." And then my mother "lost her nerves." That's what the doctors called it. "Best to keep her in the hospital," they said. "There's nothing more we can do to make her well."

My father decided there was too much competition in a big city like Chicago so we should move to a small town. Then we had to leave my mother behind.

I didn't like to think about my mother. It made me feel too sad. Whenever I did the tears would be running down my cheeks. My father and I never talked about my mother. Not that we'd said we wouldn't, we just didn't.

My father began to earn a living as a salesman. He sold cleaning goods door to door, first in our town and then in other small towns nearby. New products were always being invented. By the time he got back to our town he would start all over again with an improved miracle cleaning fluid and a fancier vacuuming brush.

I was able to look after myself while he was away. From the time I started school in Chicago I had been the one to do the shopping and keep the apartment tidy. The house we lived in now was no bigger than the Chicago apartment and it was easier to keep clean because it wasn't next to trains blowing soot.

One day Miss Bloch arrived at the school. She was a new teacher. I loved her from the very first lesson. Miss Bloch brought in her own books to read to the class. I had never heard such interesting stories—stories of brave children who overcame great odds to save themselves and others from danger, stories of imaginary places where human rules did not apply.

Miss Bloch was pretty. I liked the dresses she wore. I liked the way she sat on the table at the front of the classroom swinging her legs. Not like a teacher at all. Miss Bloch had the same hair as me—dark brown and really curly, and she wore it short.

At the end of the day I sometimes stayed back to help Miss Bloch pack up. Then we could talk about the stories and poems Miss Bloch had read to the class and about what I had written. Occasionally we talked of other things—how I managed at home, even when my father was traveling, what my life had been like in the big city. Months later, when I was absolutely sure that Miss Bloch liked me, I said, "We have the same sort of hair, don't we, Miss Bloch?"

"Yes, we do. It's Jewish hair."

"Is it?" I said. "What's Jewish?"

Eva White, born in Vienna, divides her time between Melbourne and New York City. Her stories have been published in newspapers and magazines in Australia and the U.S.

Mother, I'll Always Take Care of You

by REBECCA HIMBER BERG (CIRCA 1878–19??)

Little is known about this author, Rebecca Himber Berg, whose rich storytelling rivals I. B. Singer's, and humor, Sholom Aleichem's. At age 60, she began writing—in Yiddish—a memoir of her life, but only a chapter survives. Published in 1943 as "Childhood in Lithuania," it is in Memoirs of My People: Jewish Self-Portraits from the 11th to the 20th Centuries, *edited by Leo W. Schwartz.*

After describing her childhood in Yanesok, Lithuania, Berg goes on, according to Schwartz, to write about herself as "a mother struggling for survival in the squalor of the London ghetto… the wife of a mechanic of the Seaboard Airline Railroad in Portsmouth, Virginia, and finally… the happy matriarch of three children of high intellectual attainments." According to Berg's son (and translator), Berg claimed that her memoirs were "entirely for the benefit of her children, so that [they] might understand her and her times." He suspects, however, given her talent for the picaresque tale—so unusual for a female writer!—that his mother imagined a much grander audience.

One feels sad, reading Berg's pungent evocations of Jewish daughterhood, that such an artifact of cultural commentary is lost to us. And Schwartz's assessment of Berg is patronizing; that represents a loss, too. "Mrs. Berg rarely misses a class in English for foreigners," he writes, "where she is reported to be the star pupil."

SUSAN SCHNUR

PROPERLY, I OUGHT TO BEGIN THIS ACCOUNT BY TELLING WHEN I WAS BORN. But—I am ashamed to admit it—I do not know. You see, I was only a Jewish girl, and in my day and time, in the place when I was born, female births were not recorded.

With a boy, it was different. The Jewish community and the Russian Government collaborated in observing his birthdays. The Jewish community had to know when he would be 13, so that he could then be confirmed in the faith of his fathers; while the Russian Government wanted to know when he was 21, and a year or two later would not do at all—because they wanted him for the army. But a girl! It was enough if one reckoned that she was born some time before the "big fire," and, after that, one could begin checking off the places where she had lived—at Sarah Rifke's one year; at Yankel Hirsh's five years; at Sarah Nachman's three years—and if one happened to miss a place or two, what did it matter? Could it hurt a girl to be a few years younger?

Therefore I must… count my years as pleases me. I was born more than 60 years ago, and the world into which I was born was—then as now—bad for the Jews. My birthplace was Yanesok, in Lithuania.

My father was a poor man, a petty merchant. He had a reputation as a scholar, which meant that he spent most of his time in the synagogue when he should have been earning a living. I was the youngest child of many, and therefore I know nothing of my parents when they were young. An older sister… once told me that they were formerly well off, but when I remember them they were desperately poor, and for the rest of their lives they remained so.

my modern mom

MY MOTHER WAS, I THINK, AN INTERESTING WOMAN. In those days she was slightly in ill-repute as a modern. She spoke a number of languages quite well—German, Russian, Polish, Lithuanian, Latvian—and she was well-read, but in her day, especially in the villages, it was better for a woman if she concealed her knowledge.

When I began to grow up she told me something of her past. She was born in Jacobstadt, which is a town in Courland, near the German border. Her mother died in childbirth, and she was reared by a stepmother. Her father was a *dayan*, which is to say he used to assist the rabbi in judgments involving Jews, and these judgments were accepted as legally binding by the Russian law courts…. His second wife, my mother's stepmother, ran a tavern that was patronized by both Jews and gentiles. Jacobstadt at that time was a fine and handsome town, and a large military garrison was stationed there. My mother's beauty attracted a number of young officers to the place, and they used to chat with her and pay her many compliments. On that account her father was in great haste to get her married off, and married off she was when she was only 14.

Each year, as the custom was, my mother used to give birth to a child, but by the time I was grown, there were few of them left. Some had immigrated, far overseas, and some had died, and my mother was old and sick with grief over them before her time.

I have never made up my mind whether the women in those days were heroines or animals. When the *(continued on page 35)*

Fanny in Ottoman Palestine

by ALICE SPARBERG ALEXIOU

Last July, a few days after the marriage of my older son, Alex, and his beautiful Turkish bride, Ayse, we all—the young couple and various members from both sides of our astonishingly diverse family—gathered at the dining room table in my mother's house in Great Neck, New York. There I was with my mother, Esther; my younger son, Joseph; and Alex—all New York Jews—and my Greek husband, Nick, originally from Salonika, who became a Jew soon after we married; and my cousin Hasida and her daughter Yael, who had come from Israel for Alex's wedding; and Ayse's sister, Cigdem; and their parents, Mehmet and Gul, from Ankara, Turkey. (Try to keep the cast of characters straight, because what comes next is a bit of a genealogical roller-coaster ride.)

We had gathered post-wedding to piece together the mysterious story of Hasida's aunt, Fanny Kop, which seemed to link the disparate outposts of our newly extended family. In her late teens, Fanny ran away from Jerusalem to Istanbul with her lover, Midhat Alam, the last Ottoman governor—*mustasarrif*—of Jerusalem, and close associate of Kemal Ataturk, the brilliant politician and general who would found the modern state of Turkey in 1923.

"I was fully conscious of the danger of a relationship between a governor and a Jewish girl during one of the most active times of the Zionist movements."

Hasida, now 81, had never met her aunt, who died in her twenties, in Izmir, Turkey. What was this woman's wild journey? "There were photos of my mother, Braha, and Fanny, her older sister," Hasida told us. "I saw them, all my life." But nobody ever talked about her, Hasida said. They were ashamed of Fanny. She had disgraced her family.

The Kop family was from Kishinev, and they left Russia in 1901, fleeing the pogroms. They went first to Cairo, where they spent one year before continuing on to Palestine. They settled in Jerusalem, where the father, an Orthodox Jew, had a small shop where he eked out a living making picture frames and restoring icons. By then the family had five children.

In 1914, as the world began to fragment into what historians would later call The Great War, the British declared war against Turkey. Fighting broke out between the British and Ottoman armies in the Middle East. In Palestine, relations between the Jews and the Turkish administration deteriorated. Seventeen-year-old Fanny was volunteering as a nurse in Jerusalem's Italian hospital. Every morning on her way to work, Fanny passed the Turkish government offices (the structure still exists, and later housed the *Jerusalem Post*). There, she often saw Alam standing on the porch. According to Hasida, the two were formally introduced later, at Alam's request, at a party given by the Red Cross. Leyla Umar, who is a granddaughter of Midhat Alam and is one of Turkey's best-known journalists, tells a different version: Fanny visited Alam, expressly to invite him to the party. Umar devotes several pages to the "love story of Fanny and Midhat," which, she writes, she heard from her mother, and all the elders of her family. Umar quotes her grandfather:

"I felt an electricity in my body when Fanny entered my room. I could not control my feelings, although I was fully conscious of the dangerous outcomes of a relationship between a governor and a Jewish girl during one of the most active times of the Zionist movements."

Alam was twice Fanny's age, and already married, in fact twice married. His first wife had died; his current wife was in Istanbul with his children from both marriages. Hasida tells us that Fanny moved into the government house with Alam, and soon became pregnant. Her Jewish family was outraged. Her father refused all further contact with her. But ten-year-old sister Braha sometimes came to visit, as did their mother, with her youngest child, five-year-old Yehuda, in tow.

It was now 1917. General Allenby's British troops were advancing towards Jerusalem, and Ottoman rule there was coming to an end. Fanny, about to give birth, told her mother that she was leaving Jerusalem with Alam. The two would take the train, through Syria, for Istanbul.

"Her parents," Hasida said to us as we sat breathless around my mother's table, "tried to stop her." The night before Fanny was to leave, they sent her younger sister Braha (Hasida's mother) to her, with a basket of fruits and vegetables for the journey. Braha tried to convince Fanny not to go. Their mother, she told Fanny, would find a place on a kibbutz for her, where she could live with her child. But Fanny was adamant. "I want the baby," she told her sister, "to have both its parents."

En route to Istanbul, Fanny and Alam stopped in Aleppo, Syria. There, she gave birth to her daughter. Fanny named her Suzan, "after the roses—*shoshanim*—that were blooming in the garden of the Jerusalem house when she and Alam met," Hasida said. Fanny sent her mother a postcard from Aleppo, informing

OPPOSITE PAGE *Fanny Kop in Jerusalem circa 1916.*
ABOVE *The Kop family in Palestine circa 1912.*

them of Suzan's birth. Fanny's mother immediately took the train to Aleppo, hoping to find her daughter there. She took her little boy, Yehuda, with her. But by the time they arrived, the couple and their baby had left for Istanbul.

The grieving mother returned to Palestine. "The secret of Fanny," my cousin Yael said, "was sealed." A few years later, the Kops received a letter from the Jewish community in Izmir. In it was written that Fanny had died of tuberculosis in a hospital there. She was buried in the Jewish cemetery.

"As a Jew," Hasida noted, "although she was a Muslim." By Ottoman law, Fanny had automatically become a Muslim when she married Midhat Alam.

The rest of the story emerged: After Fanny's death, Midhat Alam married again. Suzan was raised by different members of her father's large family. She rarely saw her father, who, being close to Ataturk, was a member of the first parliament of the new nation of Turkey in 1923. She became a psychologist. She never married. She had no children.

And after she found her family in Israel, she came to visit them almost every year. She and her niece Hasida became close.

But again Umar's version of the story differs. In her memoirs, Umar also tells this version of Suzan's reunion with her Israeli family: "All the living members of her mother's family got together in the excitement of meeting her. While drinking champagne they said: 'According to our beliefs you are a Jew since your mother was a Jew.' I do not know what she felt at that moment, but she came back from Israel as soon as she went there...*I do not think that she met them later* (italics mine)."

Fanny gave birth in Aleppo and named her daughter Suzan, "after the roses—shoshanim—that were blooming in the garden of the Jerusalem house when she and Alam met."

Suzan, only five years old when her mother died, simply, in Hasida's words "disappeared." Hasida's mother, Braha, never talked about her older sister Fanny. She was, said Hasida, ashamed of what Fanny had done. But Yehuda, Hasida's uncle, who remembered taking the train to Syria as a five-year-old with his mother, never stopped wondering what had happened to Fanny's daughter. Yehuda eventually had a career in the foreign office. Over the years, he inquired again and again of people he met there, Did anybody there ever hear of an important Ottoman official who took a Jewish girl with him to Turkey?

One day in 1983, Yehuda was a guest at a dinner party at the Israeli Embassy in Ankara. Again, he asked if anybody had heard the story about the Jewish girl. This time, somebody—the Israeli ambassador—said yes. The story about Midhat Alam, he told Yehuda, is well known. In fact, he said, this house used to belong to him!

Then we pick up another thread of the story. Soon after Yehuda's visit, the journalist Leyla Umar was invited to dinner at the Israeli Embassy. She told the ambassador that the house had once belonged to her grandfather, Midhat Alam. The ambassador, writes Leyla in her memoirs, "became red in the face. He said: 'Do you know that we are searching for the daughter of the owner of this house? Her family has been trying to find her for years.'"

Leyla told her aunt, Fanny's daughter Suzan, about the connection.

One year later, Suzan, then 65, flew to Israel. "She found her family," Hasida said. "Even though she had family in Turkey from her father, we were from her mother."

Suzan, Hasida said, told her Israeli *mishpacha* that she was a Muslim. Hasida continued: "This was a delicate subject, and we didn't want to talk about it. She knew about her father, and that she had roots in Israel, but she never looked for us. But we didn't care. We only wanted to find her." Hasida then turned to Mehmet, my Turkish *mechutan*, adding: "And according to our laws, Fanny was Jewish. Because her mother was Jewish..."

Hasida told us that Suzan was very angry at Leyla after reading her version of what happened. Some of what she wrote about me, Suzan told Hasida, was not true. Afterwards Suzan did not speak with Leyla for a long time.

And there is more to this story. When my son Alex, got engaged to Ayse in 2007, I told Gul and Mehmet, my *machutunim*-to-be about Fanny, my grandfather Joseph Sparberg's first cousin, who had run away from Palestine with her Turkish lover, had his baby, and died in Izmir. That baby, I told them, lives in Ankara. And so do they. The story fascinated them. And they were determined to find her.

I called my cousins in Israel, from whom I passed on Suzan's phone number and address to Mehmet. He phoned her; no answer. He went to her apartment building; nobody answered the buzzer. He left an invitation for our children's upcoming wedding—they had two, one in Ankara, followed by another in New York—in Suzan's mailbox. Again, silence.

Finally, my mother called Hasida, who in turn called Leila Umar in Istanbul. Leila told Hasida that Suzan had died recently, several weeks before Mehmet began his attempts to contact her. I e-mailed him with the news. He replied to my message immediately, with deep sadness at the loss of this extraordinary chance to further connect us.

And now we were sitting around my mother's table, talking about Fanny, who had run away in 1917, but who in 2008 was being folded back into an expanded family story. ■

Alice Sparberg Alexiou, a contributing editor at Lilith, is the author of the 2006 biography Jane Jacobs: Urban Visionary. *She is currently writing a book about the Flatiron Building.*

time came to give birth to a child, an old woman was called in, a midwife. She made small ceremony about the affair. The prospective mother was ordered to lie down in bed, and soon after there was a cry of pain and the wailing of a child. Mazeltov! And the very next day you could see the mother sitting up in bed, supping of a huge bowl of groats, and looking smugly innocent of the whole business, as if not she were intended.

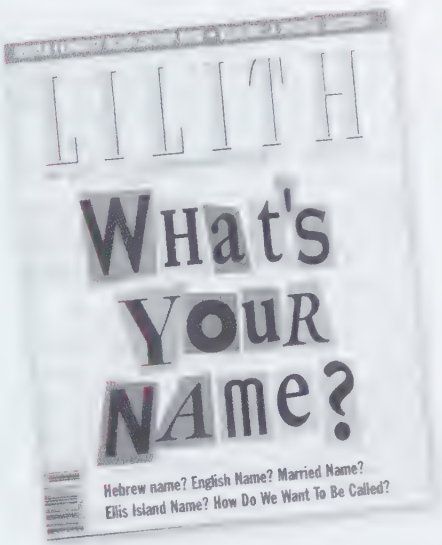
Nor was there much trouble taken with the new arrival. An old dress would be torn into strips and bound tightly around the baby's body, hindering all movement. It would then be placed into its cradle—a wooden box hanging by four ropes from the ceiling—and one of the other children, hardly much older, would be assigned the task of rocking it, and of tending to it thereafter. When we lived with Yankel Hirsh, Meishke, his apprentice in the cobbler's trade, 10 years old, used to sleep with one hand resting on the cradle. And if the baby so much as whimpered, the boy's hand would automatically begin rocking, without his waking from sleep. And if the newborn child cried excessively, the second Mrs. Hirsh, a short, fat woman, everlastingly big with child, would take a little bread and sugar, chew it into a pap, and stick it into the infant's mouth. And all would be peaceful again.

As for the other children, they wallowed about undisturbed on the floor, smeared with dirt, and with other things as well. Children were cheap in those days. Therefore people could afford to have them often.

At the time I begin my story, I was the only child left at home. A married sister, many years older than myself, lived elsewhere in the village. So that my mother and I were drawn closely together, and she would sit and talk to me for hours, not as to a child, but as if she had found in me a good friend, who could understand her, in whom she could confide. And I did in fact understand her, and the words she used to speak to me are still engraved in my heart.

I remember even the German and Russian songs she used to sing for me, in a low voice, because it was forbidden a woman to sing aloud. But even when she sang under her breath, it was sweet and sorrowful, as if a lost soul was weeping that could not find its place of peace. Tears would come to her eyes, and then I would throw my arms around her and say: "Mother, you will see. When I get married I will take you with me, against everybody in the world!"

And my mother would kiss me and laugh bitterly. Now I understand her bitter laughter. Time serves no one's convenience. As a child I suppose I was as other children. I pl2ayed, I cried. Life was bitter around me and I knew nothing about it. ■



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REVIEWS

Food & Identity

What we (don't) eat—and who we are.

Going Hungry: Writers on Desire, Self Denial, and Overcoming Anorexia (Anchor, $15.95), edited by **Kate Taylor**, is an anthology of essays by writers who have struggled with eating disorders, including Pulitzer Prize winner Louise Glück and novelists Joyce Maynard and Francine du Plessix Gray. The authors are predominately upper-middle-class white women, but include a Latino male, a black woman and an observant Jew, each of whom offers unique and diverse perspectives. Ilana Kurshan's poetic essay specifically references the strength of Jewish prayers and rituals and will be of interest to Lilith readers.

The nightmarish world of anorexia is graphically described in almost every chapter of the book. While a bit repetitive, the details will engage and educate the reader unfamiliar with the inner world of the eating-disordered person, whom John Nolan describes as one who "chews each bite silently and painstakingly" and is obsessed with "a refusal to let anyone see him eat…drink…. (or even) swallow his own saliva." Other anorexic traits—such as a constant need for overscheduling and obsessing over slimness, as well as delighting in a sense of power and superiority from "loosely hung clothing"—are discussed by several authors.

Anorexia and bulimia are the tip of an emotional iceberg. And writing, Franz Kafka wrote, "is an axe to break the frozen sea within." Every time a story is told, new details are unearthed and hidden meanings can be revealed. Francesca Lia Block writes: "I write about what is painful to me. This process transforms the pain into something meaningful, possibly even beautiful. It physically removes it from the prison of my body so I can look at it with perspective and share it with others."

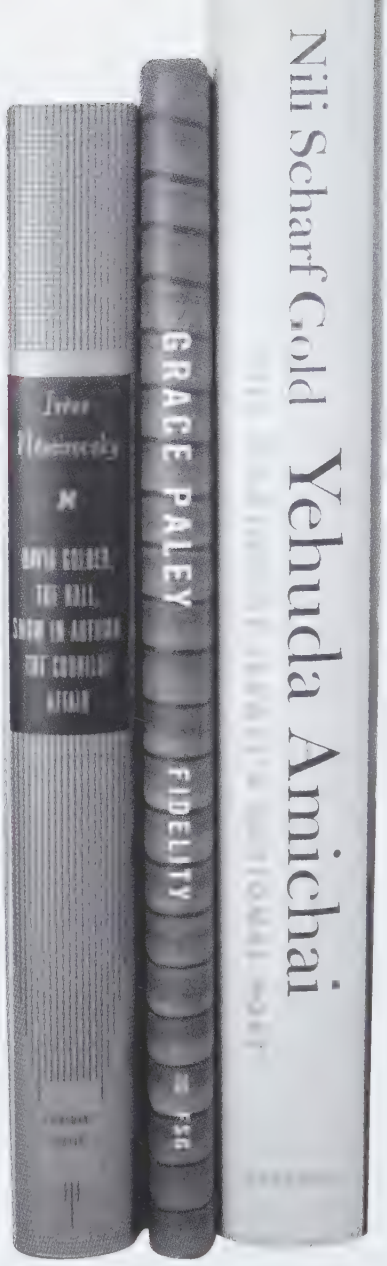
In reading this anthology, I wondered if the process of writing would have deepened self awareness for these sufferers and would illuminate their process of transformation. But the power of writing to thaw out the blue ice is explored less frequently than I had anticipated in a book of writers' memoirs.

The editor of the anthology, journalist Kate Taylor, adeptly intertwines her own experience with anorexia with a thorough history of eating disorders in the past two centuries. At the onset of her illness, she believed creativity was fueled by her masochistic relationship with food, her body and hunger, a common motif. Not until she was well into recovery could Taylor reflect on how issues of identity and individuation regarding her family contributed to her anorexia: "I used my anorexia to push myself out of the nest, and for years…I couldn't relax around my parents. I can't say when this stopped being so important, but it did. Today, I take pleasure in those parts of myself—my hunger for intimacy, my desire to mother and be mothered—that I was trying to shut off while I was anorexic."

Although most of the individuals writing here have been able to overcome life-threatening rituals, many here express regret, acknowledging that self-denial and the quest to be "thin enough" robbed them of years. Full recovery has been rare, it seems. Yet this grim conclusion contradicts my clinical experience; as a therapist and supervisor who has specialized in treating eating disorders for 30 years, I have consistently learned that in-depth psychotherapy can be the pathway to healing symptoms and thawing the dynamic issues embedded in the blue ice.

Recently a new anorexic patient asked me, "Do people recover?" When you approach a rabbi with an important question, you often receive a reading list as an answer. I wanted to educate, motivate and prepare her for the journey ahead. I handed her *Going Hungry*.

JUDITH RUSKAY RABINOR



Two Ruths of Yehuda Amichai

Uncovering the personal history of Israel's beloved poet.

Yehuda Amichai (1924–2000) was Israel's beloved unofficial poet laureate. His poems, hugely popular with ordinary Israelis, are read aloud at weddings, baby-namings and funerals. He has been published in 33 languages and rendered into English by many gifted translators.

In the fascinating, scholarly, yet eminently readable ***Yehuda Amichai: The Making of Israel's National Poet*** (Brandeis University Press, $35), **Nili Scharf Gold** adds a rich complexity to our reading of this poet, discovering formative aspects of Amichai's life he was determined to suppress as he became the quintessential Israeli poet during the early years of the modern state. Gold, a professor of Modern Hebrew Language and Literature at University of Pennsylvania, explores the poet's German linguistic and literary roots, and his fascinating relationships with two females who evoked for him themes of abandonment and betrayal.

Ruth Z. entrusted to the biographer the 94 letters from Amichai that she had shown to no one for 60 years.

As this book shows, Amichai created a stirring and generous collage of the human experience in his accessible and sometimes deceptively simple poems, where he playfully and ironically combined in the same sentence everyday and exalted language, the mundane and the erotic, the profane and the holy. In addition to the Bible, he grew up with the Hebrew of the prayer book, and he commonly turned its phrases upside down. He often voiced anti-militaristic, anti-heroic feelings in poems such as "I Want to Die in My Own Bed."

Before escaping with his family to Israel in 1936 at age 12, Amichai lived in Germany. Gold interviewed his childhood classmates and explored his old neighborhood, including the public garden he walked through to get to school and synagogue. And Gold brings us the story of Ruth Hanover, referred to in one of his poems—his childhood best friend, who walked to school with him everyday. When they were 10 they had an argument, with tragic repercussions; she rode off on a bicycle and was injured in an accident that required the amputation of her leg. Their relationship foundered, and a few years later, because of the amputation, she was unable to escape and was killed in the Shoah.

Gold illuminates Amichai's absorption as a new immigrant and his assimilation as an Israeli through a relationship with another Ruth. Referred to in the book as Ruth Z., she was Amichai's first adult love, and he hoped to marry her. Their romance lasted from January 1947 to April 1948, when she wrote to him from New York—where she had gone to study at the Jewish Theological Seminary—that she was marrying another man. Her letters from Amichai contain love poems he quoted to her and poems he wrote for her; they document both his development as a poet and his day-to-day experiences during a perilous and historic time in Israel, just before statehood was declared in May 1948. It is a gift to Amichai admirers that Ruth Z. chose to entrust to Gold the 94 letters from Amichai she had shown to no one for 60 years. Gold's new book is truly a labor of love.

NAOMI DANIS

Finis: Fidelity

Grace Paley's last poems.

In the last year of her remarkable life, **Grace Paley** completed a rather remarkable manuscript of poems. What makes ***Fidelity*** (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, $20.00) so striking is what has made Paley stand out as a poet and prose writer for many years: she is as bold and radical as she is funny. At 85, Paley's meditations are often focused on aging and the people she has lost, but the poems are also terrifically witty. In the poem, "An Occasional Speech at the Interfaith Thanksgiving Gathering," Paley writes, "Anyone who gets to be / eighty years old says thank you/ to the One in charge then im-/ mediately begins to complain."

In this poem as in all her work, Paley's art is one of connecting her individual life and state of mind with that of those around her. In a 1998 interview for Salon.com, A.M. Homes asked Paley if she thinks writers have a moral obligation. Paley answered that she thought all humans do, and writers, being human, have some as well. "I mean why," she said, "should they get off the hook?" In one short poem early in this last book, she writes:

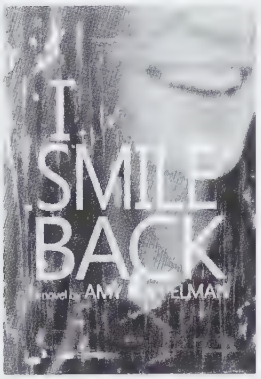
> freedom has overtaken me I
> had run ahead of it for years
> along an interesting but
> narrow road obeyed at least
> half the rules imposed by
> lovers children a house a
> political position now out
> of breath probably I'm stuck
> freedom has hold of my jacket
> won't let go I am alone

In 10 unpunctuated lines, Paley covers an incredible amount of ground. The lack of punctuation and compactness in this short poem also highlight the list of life concerns that takes over the middle of the poem. Lovers, children, home, politics—all are thrown together, with no commas or other punctuation to keep them discretely in order. One seems to beget the others, in quick succession, and still the poem ends with the speaker alone.

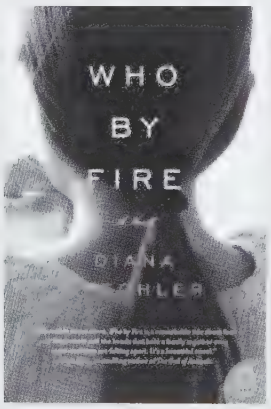
This subtle tumbling together of the different but interconnected realms of a life is part of the lean beauty and surprise of many of these late poems. In "Suddenly There's Poughkeepsie," she begins with the remark, "what a hard time / the Hudson River has had / trying to get to the sea." By the end, the Hudson's tribulations read as a kind of self-portrait as river, how the Hudson "perseveres" and moves more slowly but "dignified" and delivers itself, and us—author and readers—into a line by the activist and poet Paul Goodman, "be quiet heart/ home home/ then the sea."

IDRA NOVEY

Two new books by Lilith authors zoom in, almost cinematically, on young women fighting the collateral damage inflicted by their broken families.



I Smile Back by Amy Koppelman (Two Dollar Press, $15) focuses on Laney Brooks, a North Jersey housewife battling memories and anger using alcohol, cocaine and lots of sex with many men—including, but not limited to, her husband. Laney's fractured psyche is fertile ground for Koppelman to explore a fragmentary narrative, where events are spliced together, intercut with memories. Laney returns again and again to her father's departure—he divorced her mother and cut off all communication with Laney and her brother when they were quite young—as it is this abandonment that seems to be the root of Laney's depression, her lack of hope, her inability to trust that things can be stable and happy, "how nothing bad needs to happen for her to feel sad." She doubts her own ability to parent her young children. Laney's mortal fear of passing her own damage along to them animates many of her more likable human qualities—self-reflection and an almost painful love for her son and daughter. Despite excessive drinking, snorting cocaine on her bathroom floor and contemplating suicide, Laney tries to "gather enough strength to raise her kids with hope even though she herself exists in the fallout of that hope." This book is a demanding read, with relentless pacing, a choppy, aggressive tone and a compelling battle for redemption.



Who By Fire by Diana Spechler (Harper Perennial, $14.95) is also the story of fallout hitting the members of a broken family. After the disappearance of their younger sister Alena 13 years earlier, surviving children Bits and Ash—later Asher—part ways, choosing divergent coping mechanisms: she turns to sexual promiscuity and he, later, to ultra-Orthodoxy. Their father melts out of the picture, and their mother, Ellen, becomes a paranoid, victimized mess. Spechler, like Koppelman, uses an unusual narrative structure to display the splintering of a family: Chapters move from perspective to perspective, as Bits's, Asher's and Ellen's points of view illuminate not only their own inner flaws, but the ways in which the bonds of family do and don't hold them together. All three family members are confronted with their own demons and often make poor choices—Bits' compulsive licentiousness, Asher's resolute refusal to communicate with his family, Ellen's rash trust in a shadowy "child-deprogrammer," among others—although they rarely want to actually hurt one another. Throughout their misadventures, their deeply human desires and endearing, if frequently misused, devotion to their shared history make them characters you can love in spite of their failings.

MELANIE WEISS

Heart of Darkness

Irène Némirovsky's earliest tales.

David Golder, The Ball, Snow in Autumn, The Courilof Affair (Everyman's Library, $25), is a collection of novellas by French Jewish writer Irène Némirovsky, now available for the first time in English in a translation by Sandra Smith, with an introduction by Claire Messud. Némirovsky's tragic destiny is by now well known: Born in Kiev in 1903, she became a literary sensation in right-wing French literary salons in the inter-war years, converted to Catholicism, and was deported to Auschwitz where she died in 1942. *Suite Française*, one of Némirovsky's last works and a portrayal of France in the months following the German invasion of France in May 1940, was miraculously recovered by her daughter and published in 2004, winning France's prestigious Prix Renaudot.

David Golder, a best-seller in 1929, established Némirovsky's reputation. Its eponymous character, a rapacious oil magnate of humble Jewish Russian origins, is surrounded by his equally greedy wife and spoiled young daughter whom he loves with desperate affection. The story opens with a sordid monetary negotiation between David and his business partner (whom he will drive to suicide), and ends with an equally sordid one; each time, money carries a lethal power. Golder's financial prosperity—he is literally made of "gold"—is also his curse. In a Faustian pact with the devil, he strives to recover from bankruptcy to satisfy his daughter's greediness; but his heart starts failing him and the reader witnesses his slow spiraling into hell.

The story of *The Ball* (1930) seems straight out of de Maupassant, yet with a modern sensibility: Antoinette Kampf, the adolescent-protagonist, loathes her parents and especially her mother, a *nouveau-riche* with social ambitions. Resolved to sabotage the ball Madame Kampf is throwing to mark her entry into Parisian high society, Antoinette never mails the invitations, with tragic consequences. Astonishingly relevant for contemporary readers, *The Ball* portrays childhood as a time not so much of innocence as of violence, darkness, and

solitude. Rebellious and misunderstood, Antoinette is at once selfish and endearing, dark and funny, uncompromising and in desperate need of love.

Snow in Autumn (1931), the story of the aristocratic Karine family and their servant Tatiana Ivanovna, forced to flee Russia for France during the Russian Revolution, speaks of turmoil, civil war and the loss of homeland with a quiet poignancy and a somber elegance. As the Karines arrive in Paris after endless travails, Tatiana Ivanovna asks her master: "Should I unpack the children's things? When will we be leaving?" "But we've only just got here," say Nicolas Alexandrovitch. "Why do you want to go?" In each one of the Karines' lives, exile creates incalculable dramas, as one after the other, the layers of their previous identities peel off.

The Courilof Affair (1933), another example of Némirovsky's astonishing range, shows Leon M., a Russian Bolshevik who disguises himself as the Swiss doctor Marcel Legrand in order to kill the Czar's detested minister of education. This is a murder story where we know the end from the outset; yet suspense stems from the subtle fine tuning, as Leon M. becomes increasingly fond of his victim. They mirror each other in their vulnerability, their ambition, the vanity of their struggles. In Némirovsky's fiction doubles abound: they are a kind of antidote to lives of grim solitude, a last glimmer of hope.

How, finally, can we understand the ugly, profoundly disturbing anti-Semitic portraits of Jews that have threatened to undermine Némirovsky's reputation, especially in *David Golder*, *The Ball* and *The Courilof Affair*? A child of revolution, war, and exile, Némirovsky carries with her the irrational darkness of her times, where the forces of nature are constantly in competition with those of civilization. Perhaps we can extend to her the same sympathy she shows for her creatures. In her ability to negate or to expand herself, to inhabit both a Jew and an aristocrat, a servant and a master, a young girl and an old woman, a Bolshevik and a minister of the Czar, she is a chameleon, with infinite reserves of intelligence. In that duality and in that multiplicity perhaps lies her humanity.

YAËLLE AZAGURY

Orthodox Women

Sociological overview and a theological reckoning

Bread and Fire: Jewish Women Find God in the Everyday, edited by **Rivkah Slonim** (Urim Publications, $32.95), showcases a variety of Orthoprax womens' voices.

"Before I knew the word feminism, it knew me." So writes Slonim, who grew up ultra-Orthodox. She's aware that Orthodoxy and feminism may seem intellectually incompatible. "If women were happy within that patriarchal construct, went the cliché, they could best be compared to slaves smiling in the sun," she notes.

But for Slonim, "Judaism is neither patriarchal nor matriarchal—it is covenantal." Women's worth is ordained by God, not by our ability to act like men. When we're comfortable with our God-given nature, we transcend patriarchy's so-called restrictions.

Like many anthologies, this one has a wide range. Some of the essays are well written but not my cup of tea, such as Wendy Shalit's arch defense of *tsnius* (modesty), "A Little Bit Innocent." Describing photographs of an Orthodox woman, she writes, "That's how I learned that there are different stages in the life cycle of a modestynik. No Touching, Touching, then Hat." Shalit and I attended Williams College at the same time, and came away with wholly opposite impressions, so her essay fascinates me.

Elizabeth Ehrlich's "Seasons of the Soul" is my favorite in the book. Ehrlich alludes to the sacrifice not of Isaac but of the Mother "who bends the course of life to have everything ready for that Friday night, who brings in the Sabbath but never rests." Her yearning and her wariness are both palpable. Writing about keeping kosher, she acknowledges ambivalence: "I do not enjoy setting myself apart. I fear a statement of difference in a world that needs to see itself as one." Her laundry list of forbidden foods is poetry on the page.

Some of the anthology's best essays are poignant and pointed. Maria Schwartz's "Reverse Assimilation" describes how her youngest son "traded in his motorcycle, his ponytail and his ripped-up jeans for a dark suit, a *yarmulke* and *lernen*…I had a 'black hat' where my son used to be."

I've highlighted essays by outsiders to the Orthodox world, but most here are written by insiders. Some speak to me despite our differences. In "Studying Prayerfully," Sarah Yehudit Schneider explains that kabbalah and Hasidut see prayer as a feminine mode of service and study as a masculine one. She draws on traditional sources to argue for the "interinclusion" of feminine and masculine modes of being.

But other essays here feel pat and self-congratulatory. Roxane Peyser's "A Sanctuary within a Sanctuary" is an apologetic for the *mechitza*. She describes the scandalous way that men ogle women in a Reform temple, and concludes that the appropriate role of women in Judaism is "separate and equal."

And in "A Woman of Velcro," Ellen Golub chronicles how she once saw Shabbat as enmeshing women "in all the things feminism supposedly had freed me from," but took on the practice of making Shabbat anyway because it was the right thing to

If women were happy in that partriarchal construct, they could be compared to slaves smiling in the sun.

do for her children and for Judaism. Does that mean that if I don't choose Orthoprax observance, I'm doing it wrong?

Bread and Fire presumes that Orthodoxy is normative. Several of these writers report realizing, as adults, that their Jewish educations didn't open the richness of the tradition to them. (Sarah Shapiro: "When I as a teenager was searching for truth as only an assimilated Jewish teenager can…") But surely that's an indictment of lukewarm Jewish educations, not of liberal Judaism writ large? This recurring theme may alienate liberal readers.

I'm glad these voices have been brought together in celebration of the Judaism they cherish. I just wish we were all more easily able to acknowledge and honor each others' Jewish choices. Maybe when *Moshiach* comes.

RACHEL BARENBLAT

Beyond Hummus & Halva

Navigating the politics and pleasures of Israeli cuisine.

In October 2008, a Lebanese businessman named Fadi Abboud accused the State of Israel of stealing traditional Middle Eastern dishes like hummus and falafel by claiming them as Israeli. Abboud's intent to stick the Lebanese flag in a plate of baba ghannouj is clearly symptomatic of larger strife in the region. But it also indicates the intensely prideful connections we as individuals and societies so often make between "our" food and our identities. Amidst this cross-cultural food fight, **Janna Gur**'s cookbook, ***The Book of New Israeli Food*** (Schocken, $35), comes as a welcome taste of relief.

Gur, who founded and edits Israel's leading food and wine magazine, *Al Hashulchan Gastronomic Monthly*, views the culinary overlap between Israel and its neighbors (not to mention Diaspora Jewish culture) as a source of potential connection, not conflict. Her introduction traces Israel's gastronomic history back to biblical roots, but suggests that defining the national cuisine for a 60-year old country is "clearly premature." Instead, Gur is more interested in trying to capture a snapshot of the many tastes and traditions that make up Israel's thriving and diverse food culture right now.

The culinary overlap between Israel and its neighbors as a source of potential connection, not conflict.

The Book of New Israeli Food is filled with Eilon Paz's spectacular color photographs of food and the people who make and consume it—with friends at home, on Shabbat, and in the many cafes that dot Israel's map like poppy seeds on a bagel. Anecdotes about regional classics like olive oil, cheese, and wine add historical richness and contemporary context to the collection of recipes. For example, Gur explains how Israel's cheese culture, once confined to three categories—"white, yellow, and salty"—has grown over the last few decades to include world-renowned artisanal varieties made by family-owned, boutique dairies.

Recipes for falafel, which Gur describes with sensitive nuance, as "a common Middle Eastern street food [now] synonymous with Israeli cuisine," sit next to other popular Middle Eastern foods like couscous and roasted vegetable salad and shakshuka, as well as beloved dishes that made their way to the Holy Land from Eastern Europe: gefilte fish, potato latkes, and classic Jewish chicken soup. The holiday food section includes recipes for fresh Passover *chrain* (horseradish sauce) and Israeli cheesecake (prepared with *gvina levana*, a soft white cheese) as well as traditional Ramadan foods like *makroud* (date and sesame cookies) and *mansaf* (lamb casserole), which she gracefully and unapologetically includes as an integral part of Israel's food landscape.

Ultimately, Gur's cookbook—and whole culinary philosophy—is a celebration of "Israeli food" that transcends the political and culinary tensions that usually dominate the Middle East. Like all cultural definitions, Gur believes that the boundaries of food culture should not always be clearly staked. Instead, they should be fluid—blending together, playing off each other, and continuing to build the "gastronomic haven" that makes Israel and its neighboring lands the most sacred, savored place on Earth.

Figs Stuffed with Bulgur and Cranberry Salad

Serves 10
10 fresh figs
Pomegranate concentrate, for serving

The Salad:
100 g (3 1/2 oz) bulgur wheat
1/2 cup dried cranberries, chopped coarsely
1 cup carrots, grated coarsely
2-3 tablespoons fresh coriander (cilantro), chopped
1 tablespoon sesame seeds, roasted
3 tablespoons pecans, chopped
2 tablespoons pomegranate concentrate

1. Soak the bulgur wheat in water for 4-5 hours, until it swells up and softens. Or, add half a cup of water to the wheat and cook in a microwave oven for 3-4 minutes until the bulgur softens and absorbs the water. Allow to cool.

2. Mix the bulgur with the other salad ingredients. The preparation up to this point may be done in advance and the salad kept in the refrigerator.

3. Halve the figs and scoop out some of the flesh, which you can add to the salad. Place two fig halves on each plate, heap on the salad, sprinkle with pomegranate concentrate and serve.

LEAH KOENIG

Sweet & Bitter Marriage

A sensual novel in New Mexico's desert

A multicultural, ethnic twist on the saga of westward expansion in the United States, ***The German Bride*** (Ballantine, $25) by **Joanna Hershon** tells the story of Eva Shein's journey from a bourgeois Jewish girlhood in 1860s Berlin to the complexities of womanhood in Santa Fe, New Mexico.

Engrossed in the immigrant tale, the reader tends to forget a very important point: Eva's journey is impelled by her sexual transgression with Heinrich, a non-Jewish artist who had painted portraits of Eva and her sister. This novel of a young Jewish girl in nineteenth-century Europe owning her own sexuality is striking and sets the tone for this unusual narrative.

Irrationally guilt-ridden over her sister's death in childbirth and terrified of bringing shame on her family, Eva engineers and accepts a marriage proposal from Abraham Shein. Just returned from America, Shein is "an imposing man, a man who liked to take chances." These two willful souls are equally matched as they strike out to the American wilderness.

One of the strengths of this novel is capturing the small joys, disappointments, complexities, and emotional compromises in their marriage. Hershon does not flinch from portraying harsh realities, from the cockroaches covering a loaf of white bread in steerage to Eva gagging from her husband's "bitter flesh and whiskey smell as he reached for her breasts" before falling asleep.

There is a lovely scene where Eva is soaking under the stars in a bathtub never moved inside the house. Her solitude reflects her acceptance of all the ways her husband has disappointed and failed her. Yet when he comes home and finds her, they make love in the water. It is a strong portrayal of that bittersweet moment near the end of many marriages.

Some of the characters in the novel are hastily drawn and function as little more than historical place markers or cultural stereotypes. These include the neurasthenic absentee mother off taking the waters at Karlsbad; a revolutionary uncle exiled to Paris; Chela, the indispensable but nonverbal Spanish maid; and Dona Cuca, the evil saloon keeper who lures Eva's husband Abraham into debauchery and a gambling debt from which he will never recover.

Though the ending feels a bit contrived, what is lacking in characterization is made up for in Hershon's descriptive abilities. The narrative provides a tactile and sensual reading experience—one can feel the warm, adobe walls and envision the plaza sprouting with Santa Fe's first essential stores, including those run by enterprising Jewish immigrants like Eva's husband and Meyer, his stalwart brother.

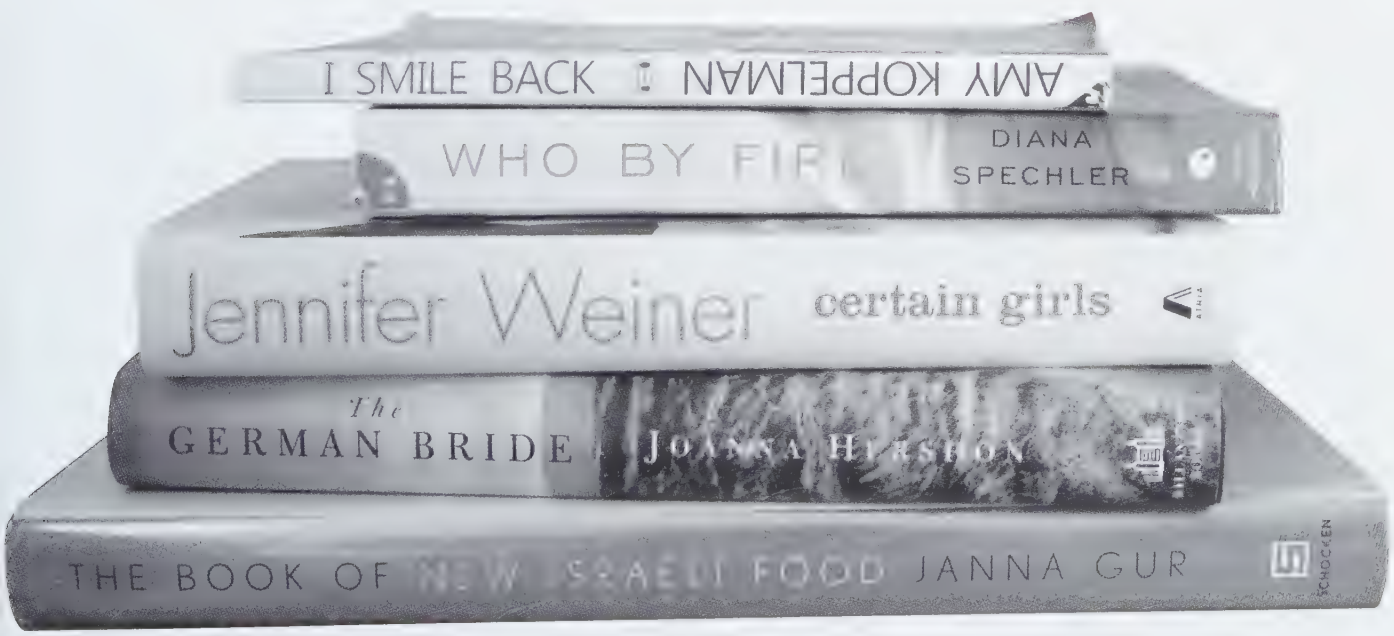
Hershon captures the New Mexican desert's addictive quality, which mirrors Eva's quest for an authentic life: "Even if she was inside a windowless kitchen, she knew the exact color of those hills at every time of day; she had memorized their severe yet intangible quality, how they were always there and always out of reach."

DEBRA L. SCHULTZ

Polyglot Devotions

Historical Jewish women's prayers from Persia, North Africa—and the world over.

The past 20 years or so have witnessed the publication of many books devoted to women's prayerful expression (Tikva Freymer-Kensky's *Motherprayer*, Elizabeth Resnick Levine's *A Ceremonies Sampler*, and Irene Fine's *Midlife and The Wise Woman* come to mind). Now, ***A Jewish Woman's Prayer Book*** (Spiegel



and Grau, $27.50), edited by **Aliza Lavie**, contributes more Israeli, Persian, and North African voices to this canon.

The original Hebrew version, *Tfilat Nashim* (Yedioth Ahronot, 2005), brought together women's prayers for the holidays, life-cycle events, home ceremonies and crises culled from (but not limited to) rabbinic literature, siddurim, and collections of *tkhinnes* (women's prayers in Yiddish, dating mostly from the 18th and 19th centuries). The new volume retains the content and formatting of the bestselling original, with the Hebrew prayer texts now accompanied by English translations.

As an anthology, whether in Hebrew or English, the volume is both a treasure trove and a hodge-podge, delighting and frustrating the reader in equal measure. Aside from broad topical divisions, some expected and some unanticipated (e.g., "Holidays" is there with "Prayers for Peace and Redemption"; "Rituals and Customs" alongside "Prayers for Mothers"), there is no apparent organization within each topic, so a late-medieval Italian source can be found alongside a contemporary Israeli composition, followed by a rabbinic selection, followed by *tkhinnes*—maddening for someone who wants coherence, but a wealth of choices nonetheless. Also heartening are the numerous selections from the Arab and Persian Jewish communities, as well as contemporary Israeli writers, which all together help to distinguish this volume from previous collections of *tkhinnes* (Devra Kay, Chava Weissler and Tracy Guren Klirs have previously mined that material), and leaves it most resembling Ellen Umansky's and Dianne Ashton's *Four Centuries of Jewish Women's Spirituality*, although without its North American bias.

This is a book not meant to be read sequentially, but rather dipped into, which can leave the reader oftentimes wondering who a writer is and when she lived. There is frustratingly little information about the sources of some of the texts, especially those from the Yiddish. The Yiddish original is also not printed, which seems a pity, considering how many Yiddish readers there are among us.

A Jewish Woman's Prayer Book does not have the bibliographical value or historical treatment that Umansky, Ashton and Weissler brought to their work, but it does successfully capture a sense of Israeli women's spirituality in the early 21st century. As such, it promises to be an important addition to our growing library of women's rituals and prayer texts.

DEBRA REED BLANK

Intergenerational Secrets

An enticing glimpse at a little shtetl on the Canadian prairie.

Holding My Breath by **Sidura Ludwig** (Shaye Areheart, $23), a coming-of-age story set in Winnipeg's shtetl-like North End in the middle of the 20th century, brings to life a time and place with such detail, both sensual and factual, that someone who grew up in that time and place—like this reviewer, born on the very same street where the protagonist lives with her family—finds herself on nearly every page.

What is so remarkable about this coincidence is at the very heart of the book. Growing up in Winnipeg in the 1950s, we used to read longingly about the world outside the isolated prairie. There were no books then about a Jewish girl coming of age in Winnipeg. We made do with *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* and *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. It is this intimate, hidden world, this northern outpost hothouse that Sidura Ludwig recreates with tenderness.

The story unfolds in the voice of Beth, an only child named for her zeyde, who was Binyamin Rabinowitz in Russia but Ben Rosen in Canada. In the character of Beth, Ludwig harvests the stories of the generation that preceded her, the transition generation that was born into the Winnipeg shtetl and struggled to escape the stranglehold of tradition, family, security and, not least of all, geography. It is Beth who says, at the beginning of Chapter Two, "I have become my family's narrator.... I have strung together all of these disconnected stories and details, and made them flow in a narrative."

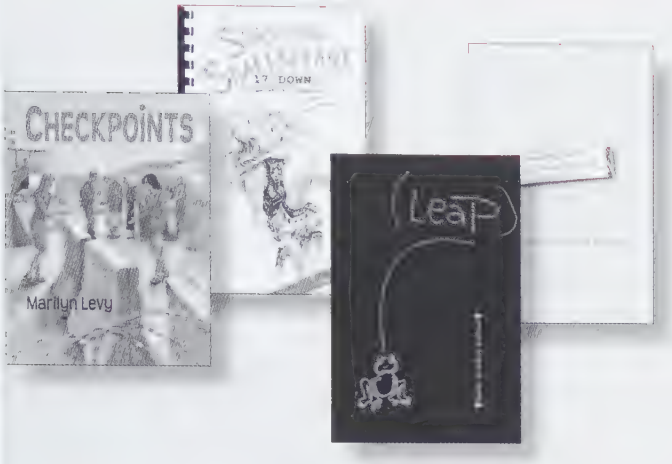
Beth's mother represents duty and acceptance, finding "naches" in her home and family. Beth writes about her mother's attraction to her father. "My father smelled like everything she thought she wanted in her life—the McAdam Avenue house, four children, a membership to Hadassah." Her mother's path of escape from the stultifying, odiferous shtetl life was not to leave Winnipeg but to be a "Successful Jewish Woman" whose achievements include setting a nice table, serving as an upstanding member of the artistic and literary "Monday Group" and raising a successful daughter. It's understood that this daughter, in seeking independence as an adult, may want to leave the North End, but only to journey as far as a new home in the upwardly mobile South End—"as far as any Monday Group member imagined her daughter moving."

But Beth's mother has two sisters who chose very different paths. Carrie, who never married and works as a seamstress, still openly mourns the loss of their only brother in the war while hiding her real grief. Her bid for freedom, as Beth learns eventually, was a pregnancy that ended with temporary banishment to Montreal and a baby given to an adoption agency. The youngest sister, Sarah, is a beauty who wants to make a name for herself as an actress. But she succumbs to an appropriate Winnipeg beau, gives birth to a daughter and only then leaves to follow her dream, which never really materializes.

These are familiar stories, and the characters never come fully alive. They slip in and out of the narrative, functioning more as cautionary tales than as flesh and blood. Both the strength and weakness of *Holding My Breath* is its documentary quality; one wanders through this book as if through a marvelous museum. Ludwig, a talented and promising young author, captures the past even in the smells she invokes, from Beth's dying Baba, who smelled "like pea soup and sweat" to an old house which was starting to smell "like fifty guests, sweaty and nearly spoiled like the chicken soup."

JUDY GERSTEL

Seders, Headscarves, Accidents, Terrorism, Army Service, Gay Best Friends: *What young adult fiction talks about now*



Freefall (Greenwillow, $16.99), Anna Levine's riveting novel for young adults (after *Running on Eggs*), is set in an Israel that requires its young people to take on awesome responsibilities and risks for the lives of others. When it's time for her to be drafted into the Israeli Defense Forces, 18-year-old Abigail Jacobs, full of empathy, longing, grit, fear, feminist consciousness and a sense of humor, tries out for a combat unit despite being underweight and discouraged by her disputatious family. "I know you still want me to be a kid. But being a kid isn't a luxury I can allow myself now."

Checkpoints (Jewish Publication Society, $14), a novel by Marilyn Levy, is narrated by Noa, a high school student with an older sister musical prodigy, an older brother, a soldier, refusing to serve in Israel's occupied territories and a family with close Palestinian friends. This year their strong-willed grandmother insists the family celebrate Passover with her in Netanya; Levy weaves her fictional characters into the terrible massacre that occurred there at the Park Hotel on Passover 2002. The dramatic story, with its realistically three-dimensional characters, is full of subplots and surprises.

Unwind (Simon & Schuster, $16.99), by Neal Shusterman, takes place after a heartland war. Citizens are living with a mutually hated compromise between pro-choice and pro-life forces. In this future dystopia, no abortions are permitted, but the parents of children between 13 and adulthood may have their children "unwound" so their 600 body parts can be harvested to give to others. Some children are even "tithed," raised from birth for such "redemption." This compelling novel tells of three young people attempting to escape or accept their designation. (A note suggests to readers that if more people signed cards to donate their organs the world might possibly have not gone so mad.)

Amal, the narrator of *Does My Head Look Big in This?* by Randa Abdel-Fattah (Orchard, $8.99), is an Australian-born Muslim-Palestinian teenager who decides after winter break to return to her private nonsectarian high school wearing a hijab (headscarf), essentially coming out as a devout Muslim. She has to tell the boy she has a crush on that she's saving kissing for when she is older and ready to get married, and she learns to navigate and respect how her aunts and uncles and cousins have made various different accommodations to assimilating into Australian society post 9/11. *"The next morning at fajr I pray that Ms. Walsh lets me wear the hijab and that Leila's parents get some brain cells and quit pressuring Leila about marriage. That Simone's next diet works, Adam and I become the best of friends, and Ms. Walsh lets me wear my hijab. I pray that Palestinians are granted the same rights and freedom and dignity that the Israelis enjoy and that the streets fill with Israelis and Palestinians walking side by side in peace. And that Ms. Walsh lets me wear my hijab."*

A raucous seder where the family and predictable guests play Haggadah Jeopardy is one of the gems in Jake Wizner's debut novel *Spanking Shakespeare* (Random House, $7.99), a boy's humorous self-deprecating, angst-filled narrative of the embarrassments and indignities of growing up. Shakespeare Shapiro begins by sharing how his parents decided on his name, and goes on to chronicle his senior year in high school, hoping for love and sex, losing some of his naivete and realizing that there are people in the world with more dire challenges than his.

In *Leap* (Knopf, $15.99), Jane Breskin Zalben, perhaps best known for her "Benji and Pearl" Jewish holiday picture books, brings us a poignant middle-school story of losses and triumphs, a young swimmer's debilitating accident and some imperfect parents, including a mother who needs to leave her family to save herself. Although no bat/bar mitzvah celebrations are mentioned, this book gives a strong sense of young people facing the myriad challenges of coming of age, including finding meaning in friendships in order to survive life's heartbreaks.

Sarah Aronson's debut novel, Head Case (Roaring Brook Press, $16.95), takes us inside the head of a "head," slang for someone paralyzed from the neck down. The narrator of this deeply sobering story is Frank Marder, a teen who, driving drunk, caused the accident that killed his about-to-become girlfriend and left him quadriplegic. Aronson trained as a physical therapist and pays great attention to the details of bodies while exploring responsibility and forgiveness, guilt and self pity.

Naomi and Ely's No Kiss List (Random House, $8.99) by Rachel Cohn and David Levithan is told by multiple characters, including Naomi and her gay best friend Ely, whom she had always imagined she would one day marry, and their assorted love interests and friends.

NAOMI DANIS

The Morning After

What happened after Good in Bed.

Jennifer Weiner's ***Certain Girls*** (Atria Books, $24.95) is a homecoming of sorts: Weiner brings her readers back to Candace Shapiro, the snappy protagonist of her bestselling first novel *Good in Bed*, a novel many cuts above its chick-lit sisters.

The transition generation that was born into the Winnipeg shtetl struggled to escape the stranglehold of tradition, family and, not least of all, geography.

Candace, or Cannie, now 13 years older in her late thirties or so, lives in Philadelphia and is married to Peter Krushevelansky, her old diet doctor ("bariatric physician!" he would put it), who is helping her to parent her daughter, Joy. The father, Bruce Guberman, is Cannie's ex-boyfriend, largely absent, at least emotionally. Cannie is an at-home mom whose attentions are focused on soon-to-be-a-bat-mitzvah Joy—much to Joy's chagrin. When Joy reads her mother's bestselling and thinly-veiled autobiographical novel about her past, she starts wondering about where she came from, metaphorically as well as literally, and sets out to find out.

Much of the book banks on the readers' affection for Cannie—and it's a good bet, as Cannie was thoroughly fleshed out (terrible pun intended) in Weiner's first novel, where she was vivid, personally flawed and therefore tellingly real. *Certain Girls* alternates chapters between Joy's voice and Cannie's with varying degrees of effectiveness; sometimes, the switch is jarring. Nevertheless, Weiner shows off her dexterity with the newer voice of Joy, an absolutely believable teenager. While she's different from her mother, she shares the wit and intellect that made her mom's novel a pleasure to read.

This book largely concerns itself with how Joy deals with her mother's novel about pre-motherhood life, but also rotates on the axis of Joy's impending bat mitzvah. In a great moment of trademark Weiner wit, Peter says to Cannie, "You think that bar mitzvahs like Tyler's are the reason the world hates America in general, and Jews in particular, and that if we throw Joy a hundred-thousand-dollar party with dancers and video invitations and costume changes, it means that the terrorists have won," to which Cannie responds, "More or less." In terms of Judaism, on the spectrum between reverence and sarcasm, the book steers a clear course in the center (with a few dips toward the sarcastic, of course).

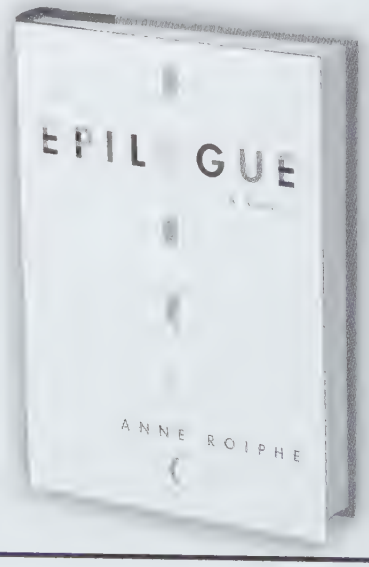
As a general rule, though, the book is an accurate and enjoyable reflection of each generation's world and preoccupations, concerns and fears, sentiments and vocabulary. Cannie's sister is a perennial source of concern: at "thirty-two and holding," Cannie is concerned with the impact she might have on Joy: "God only knew what Elle would think was an appropriate dress for a thirteen-year-old. By the time my sister was through with her, Joy would probably be demanding a pimps and hos party complete with monogrammed condoms in the gift bags." For Joy, her mother's utter lack of fashion sense is a true dilemma: "It looks like God ate Mexican food, then threw up on you," she lovingly tells her mother in Nordstrom.

From ANNE ROIPHE, author of the National Book Award finalist *Fruitful*, comes *Epilogue*, a "luminous memoir... a beacon of help and, ultimately, hope."*

"A raw, painful and yet occasionally comic memoir....The moving story of the aftermath of an irreplaceable relationship." —*New York Times Book Review*

"[Roiphe's] willingness to expose her uncertainties is brave and moving." —*Boston Globe*

"A beautifully written tale of a life reclaimed." —*USA Today*



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**Booklist*

Still, this novel, like its characters, is not without "issues." Without going into detail, a plot twist in the final stretch of the book utterly confounded me in its seeming arbitrariness. If I brought that up to the real-life Weiner, though, or to Cannie, she might counter that *life* sometimes confounds us with its seeming arbitrariness as well. To which I'd respond, fair enough.

JORDANA HORN

Our Reviewers

YAËLLE AZAGURY writes on French and Francophone literature. Her most recent essay will appear in *Women Writing Africa: The Northern Region*, forthcoming from the Feminist Press.

RACHEL BARENBLAT is a poet (author most recently of *chaplainbook*, laupe house 2006) and a student in the ALEPH rabbinic program. Find her online at velveteenrabbi.blogs.com/blog/.

NAOMI DANIS is the author, most recently, of *Splish-Splash*, a board book for toddlers.

JUDY GERSTEL grew up in Winnipeg in the 1950s. She's been a journalist at several American dailies, most recently at the Toronto Star.

JORDANA HORN is a lawyer and journalist at work on her first novel.

LEAH KOENIG edits Hazon's blog, The Jew & The Carrot. Her writing has appeared in The New York Times Magazine, Gastronomica, and elsewhere.

IDRA NOVEY'S first book of poems, *The Next Country*, will be published in fall 2008; recent poems appear in Paris Review, Slate, and Ploughshares. She teaches at Columbia University and in the Bard College Prison Initiative.

DEBRA REED BLANK is the Rabbi Philip Alstat Assistant Professor of Liturgy at The Jewish Theological Seminary in New York.

JUDITH RUSKAY RABINOR, a psychotherapist in New York, is the author of *A Starving Madness: Tales of Hunger, Hope and Healing in Psychotherapy*.

DEBRA L. SCHULTZ is the author of *Going South: Jewish Women in the Civil Rights Movement* and a great fan of northern New Mexico.

MELANIE WEISS is a graduate student and freelance editor and writer.

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What are you doing this summer?

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JULY FIVE WEEK INSTITUTE
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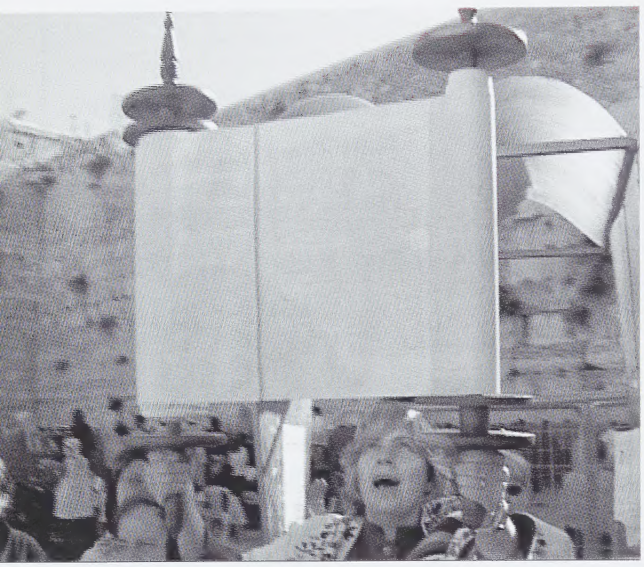

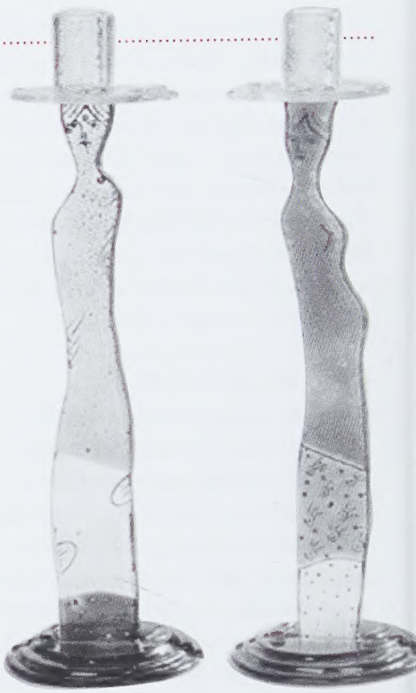

Praying loudly

Women of the Wall have been battling since 1989 with the ultra-Orthodox establishment in Israel over their right to wear prayer shawls and read aloud from the Torah at the Western Wall in Jerusalem. Filmmaker Yael Katzir sees the battle as a test case on the second-class status of women in Israeli public life, the pressures of religious coercion and the hunger for equality. "Praying in Her Own Voice" (2007) is a passionate 60-minute documentary shown at the 23rd annual Israel Film Festival in New York, Los Angeles and Miami. *israelfilmfestival.com*

Jewish tradition, change & gender in a global context

In Sofia, Bulgaria, talk about all this at the Fifth Bet Debora Conference of European Women Rabbis, Jewish Community Politicians, Activists and Scholars, June 25–28, 2009. What unique viewpoints do Jewish women bring to the integration of immigrants, creation of multi-cultural societies, Jewish-Islamic dialogue and immigration policies? How does migration affect gender in Jewish communities? How does gender affect how Jews communicate with wider non-Jewish societies? What sanctifies Jewish homes now, and what will sanctify them in the future? Send abstracts (max. 250 words) for proposed papers by February 10, 2009 to Tania Reytan-Marincheshka. *treytan26@yahoo.com.*

Make change

Find out about public policy issues and initiatives and get involved yourself via a new website from the National Council of Jewish Women, an organization that has supported progressive social change for more than a century. You'll find polls, places to comment on articles, and opportunities to report on local advocacy efforts. *action.ncjw.org/ncjw/home.html*

The Saturday-night schvitz

Jan Booker explores the "secret sacred world of women" she discovered when as a young girl she accompanied her grandmother to the public baths in southern Philadelphia, the equivalent for working-class Jewish women of a night out at dinner and the theater, or a modern-day spa. Read this and other stories, as well as submit your own stories on a new website, The Jewish Writing Project, where Jews from assorted backgrounds and all ages tell about what being Jewish means to them. *jewishwritingproject.wordpress.com*

A rainbow tallit, a Ruth-and-Naomi blessing

A lesbian ketubah, lambda hamsa necklace, rainbow mezuzot, and more are available from the only Israeli Judaica supplier that offers a collection of LGBT-appropriate items. (LGBT: lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender.) Representing 16 Israeli Judaica artists and jewelers, this new enterprise at Hanaton in the Galilee supplies gift stores at synagogues, JCCs, Hillels, and Federations as well as private Judaica shops. Galilee Judaica, *galileejudaica.com*

Avoiding rocket fire

Shlomit Ekstein leads Afikim baNegev, a group of 150 people who moved to Sderot, in order to strengthen this Israeli town of 24,000 which has been the target of Kassam rockets for the past eight years. And then there's Sharon Yosef, who directs social services in the small town of Shomi, on the Mediterranean border near Lebanon, a town being revived after years of terror incidents, unemployment and crime. These women are featured in the final report of the Ziv Tzedakah Fund which Danny Siegel is closing down after 27 years. His fund has specialized in supporting grass-roots

"mitzvah heroes," many of them women. Siegel has taught about tzedakah to thousands in various settings and the fund has been a conduit for millions of dollars, supporting individuals doing good deeds and repairing the world. Read about amazing people and their projects at *ziv.org* and learn about a new fund set up by some of Siegel's students at *mitzvahheroesfund.org*

Our tribe

Barbie dioramas, slam poetry archival footage, graphics and animation weave together in this "appetizer for discussion" film by Tiffany Shlain. She takes off from the history of the world's most popular doll and asks what it means to be an American Jew today. And what does it mean to be a member of *any* tribe in the 21st century? "The Tribe" now comes with the Unorthodox Discussion Kit, a curriculum guide that explores issues that would be relevant in a college classroom or with audiences of unaffiliated Jews. *tribethefilm.com*

Politics with art

Painter Susanne Schueller, known as Soshana, was born in Vienna in 1927 and had her first major exhibition in Cuba in 1948. From her early expressionistic portraits and still lifes to an abstract style, her work reflects the political circumstance of the post WWII-era. Her career has spanned the globe: Switzerland, England and New York. Later paintings draw on her travels to Israel, Asia, Africa and South America. Both Picasso and Giacometti painted her portrait; she did too (see above). Through February 15 at Yeshiva University Museum in New York, *yumuseum.org*

The evaded curriculum

Are you an educator concerned that one of your students has an eating disorder? Or a youth-group leader who senses that your chapter president is struggling with her sexual identity? A program at the Davidson School of Education at the Jewish Theological Seminary, directed by Shira Epstein, offers an online resource guide that addresses social and emotional topics for those who works with Jewish preteens, teens, or young women to help them create safer and more positive environments. *jtsa.edu/evadedissues*

Women's blood in Jewish tradition

An anthology aims at expanding sacred Jewish understandings of women's blood and menstrual and post-partum bleeding experiences. Editor Holly Shere invites submissions of scholarly articles, creative non-fiction, blueprints for new rituals, poetry, midrash and visual art by February 15, 2009. *onewithaflow.org*

Jewish girl power

Five 14-year-old girls in Toronto talk candidly with academic, activist and writer Nora Gold about what it's like to grow up Jewish and female in the beginning of the twenty-first century. In 2003, Gold was awarded a four-year research grant from the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada to do a longitudinal study of Canadian Jewish girls' experiences of antisemitism and sexism. This film is one result. *Noragold.com*

How to study Torah

Since the 2007 publication of *The Torah: A Women's Commentary,* editors Tamara Eskanazi and Rabbis Andrea Weiss and Hara Person are developing a study program for Women of Reform Judaism to accompany various weekly Torah readings. You can download their free study guides at *womenofreformjudaism.org/wrjtorah-studyguideprogram*

Cultivating female talent

A report by Didi Goldenhar and Sivanie Shiran focuses on the experiences and career goals of 130 women at 47 Jewish federations. What do these researchers now recommend? Sequenced career planning, system-wide mentoring, and policies for workplace flexibility that would allow professionals—men as well as women—to be leaders even while leading fulfilling personal lives. Read the report, "Cultivating the Talent: Women Professionals in the Federation System" and participate in a Flexibility Campaign to encourage Jewish organization to improve their policies around parental leave and workplace flexibility. Go to Advancing Women Professionals and the Jewish Community, *advancingwomen.org*

For events and projects taking place between issues of Lilith, and to listen to podcasts and respond to blog posts, check out WHAT'S NEW on the Lilith homepage: *www.Lilith.org*. Send suggestions for this section to *info@Lilith.org*

compiled by Naomi Danis

The plague is the "to do" list

by BONNIE J. MORRIS

Just for once, I am all caught up. And *this* should be the mantra,
The brucha, the Haggadah;

Freedom from our slavery is
The tearing up of lists.

Let those errands go.
The list is the affliction

My foremothers brought out of Egypt;
Busy Jewish women, tikkun olam their schedule;

Even before Moses there were tablets chiseled, headed
What to take in flight from Egypt.

Bug repellent, probably, for babies' tender flesh
Tents to dwell in, papyrus maxi-pads

Hiking sandals, waterproof sunblock for those
Red Sea crossings. Timbrels, naturally,

For the other side.

A few thousand years later, we celebrate that freedom
With overwork and lists: whole wheat matzos,

Vegan shank bones, fair-trade egg-free macaroons
Until the hostess drops. (Call it "reclining.")

Rebellious child, I will not clean. I will not cook.
I'll recline in a messy house of Whole Foods take-out,

Freedom rising in my heart for eighteen minutes—
Kosher for Passover—lists ripped up

And *resting*, relishing the work
Of all the women who gave me my life.

Bonnie Morris is a women's studies professor at George Washington University and the author of seven books, including Lubavitcher Women in America *and the forthcoming teaching memoir* Revenge of the Women's Studies Professor.

Peace is the blithe distraction

by LYNN LEVIN

Peace is the dream you sleep for.
Peace is a lily shared by two people with knives.
Peace is prettier, but war has more to say.

Peace may not be possible with everybody.
Peace is the death of history.
Peace is what the war dead don't get to enjoy.

Peace is what happens when you ask a plain girl to dance
and find out she's not so bad after all.
Peace makes you forget that other people are
planning your destruction.
Peace is the hope that those who oppose you
will also listen to you.

Peace is passing up the dessert tray of revenge
and hoping your enemy will do the same.
Peace lets you appreciate many small annoyances
because you know they are not war.
Peace is never complete, though one dreams of
the fullness thereof.

Lynn Levin's third collection of poems, Fair Creatures of an Hour, *will be published by Loonfeather Press in 2009.*

The publication of original poetry in Lilith is made possible with the generous support of Charlotte A. Newberger.